

# People First Tennessee



## Chapter Manual



***“People First Tennessee empowers people with disabilities to have voices in addressing issues of equality that affect them”***





## 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 disabilities are learning to speak for themselves and share ideas, friendships and information. The People First of Tennessee Chapter Manual will provide information to help you organize and run a self-advocacy group.

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

Starting a People First chapter is a lot of hard work. It takes time and patience and a sense of humor. It can also be very rewarding. We offer suggestions in this handbook to help your group get started. Additional information and resources are also available on our website at

<http://www.thearctn.org/PeopleFirst.php>

Good luck and welcome to People First!

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## Section 1 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*

*Advocacy*

*The Structure of People First*

*The People First Philosophy*

### **What is People First?**

#### **We Are People First!**

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

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

We encourage local chapters of People First to set and follow their own agendas according to the needs of their local communities. We ask that local chapters operate within the guidelines set by the mission of People First Tennessee.

#### **DO WE REALLY WANT TO SPEAK FOR OURSELVES?**

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



## **WHAT ARE OUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES?**

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

## **WHAT CAN WE TEACH THE COMMUNITY IN WHICH WE LIVE?**

We can teach the community that we can do things that they never thought we could. We are teaching communities that we can learn, and that we know what is going on around us. We can vote, ride 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 councils, not-for-profit committees, boards. We develop service projects to the communities we live in.

## **WHAT DO WE WANT?**

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

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

People First members don't want to live in poverty. We want to be employed. We want to be paid a fair wage when we work. People First members want transportation to get where we want to go. We want access to affordable 24-hour transportation. We want full medical and health benefits.

## **WHAT DO WE OFFER?**

People First offers support, a united voice and advocacy to its members. We offer information and help develop service projects in the communities in which we live. We offer information and assistance to those wanting to start new chapters.

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

The People First of Tennessee Chapter Handbook offers information to help you start a People First chapter. If you need additional information, please visit our web page at [www.thearctn.org/People-First.php](http://www.thearctn.org/People-First.php)

## **THE HISTORY OF PEOPLE FIRST AND SELF-ADVOCACY**

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

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.

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 is over 800 self-advocacy groups. Some of these are supported by local or state organizations, 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 (SABE), 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.



*Scott Finney and People First Members protest Institutional Living which led to the passing of the Olmstead Act of 1999.*

### **The History of People First Tennessee**

In 1981 twelve individuals who saw the People First movie at an Adult Basic Education Class organized the Nashville and State Chapters of People First. This was the catalyst event for enriching the quality of life for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. People First was responsible for training hundreds of individuals with disabilities across Tennessee on self-determination and self-advocacy. The most notable accomplishment of People First was drawing attention to the poor treatment and violation of human dignity occurring in Tennessee's State Developmental Centers. Nearly 25 years later, every Developmental Center in Tennessee is closed, and people are living fully inclusive lives in their communities with the supports that they need.

#### **Why we Need People First** by Joe Wrinkle

“People First helps people with disabilities learn their true potential as to what they can do. People First teaches us that we can live in the community (as in community inclusion) instead of institutions where we don't belong.

**People First trains us to be better self-advocates to advocate for ourselves and others who are not able to speak for themselves.** People First also trains us to be leaders on all levels (national, state, and local) of People First.”

### **The Structure of People First**

**Guest:** A person who decides to visit a People First Meeting to see what it is like. If he or she enjoys the meeting they may choose to join the chapter.

**Members:** A person who has joined a People First Chapter. If he or she has a disability, they may vote and/or hold an office.

**Mentors:** A person who supports a People First Chapter and its members. Many mentors may not have a disability. Mentors who do not have a disability may not vote or hold an office.

**Local Chapters:** Local Chapters decide how often they meet. Some meet monthly, some meet every other month, some quarterly. Local Chapters develop their own agendas and plan their own activities.

**Advisory Council:** The People First of Tennessee Advisory Council is an elected group of self-advocates who help guide the organization and have input into its goals and activities.

**State Meetings:** Tennessee has a statewide membership meeting annually during the Tennessee Disability MegaConference.

**International Meetings:** People First has chapters worldwide. There are active chapters in Europe, Africa, Great Britain, and the United States.

## **PEOPLE FIRST PHILOSOPHY**

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

- People First represents a statement by persons that we want to be perceived by others as people who have something to offer and skills to share rather than being seen as persons with handicaps and limitations.
- People First is a self-advocacy organization and that means that people learn to speak for themselves.
- People First membership is open to anyone. However, only members with a disability may vote or hold an office.
- 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 ensure 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 mentors working with people with disabilities in order to provide the modeling and support necessary for the development of self-advocacy and leadership skills.
- People First mentors provide modeling and support by working with individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities to neutralize barriers that stand in the way of persons advocating for themselves.
- People First belongs to its members.



## **Section 2 Starting People First Chapters**

### **“People First chapters belong to the members”**

*Membership Dues Process*

*Keeping a Chapter Strong*



# STARTING A PEOPLE FIRST CHAPTER

A People First chapter begins when a group of people with 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.

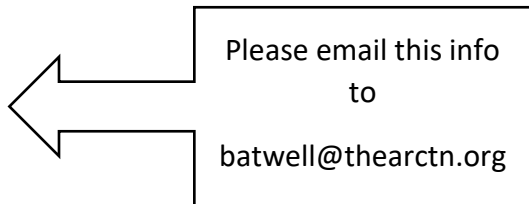
## MEMBERSHIP DUES PROCESS

When joining a People First chapter, there are dues that the individual must pay. For a **self-advocate** the cost is **\$5**, for a **person without a disability** it is **\$20**, and for a **business** it is **\$100**. Dues are money for your chapter and provide a small amount of money to People First Tennessee. Dues help pay for refreshments, training, fun activities, etc. Any self-advocacy group can become a chapter of People First by expressing that desire and enrolling members to People First (i.e. Down Syndrome associations, Autism associations, Coalitions, Independent Living Centers, etc.).

Local chapters of People First in Tennessee will:

1. Designate one person (can be the mentor) for membership processing.
2. Submit names, addresses, phone numbers and emails of members to People First Tennessee in one of the following ways listed below. New and renewing members information should be sent monthly (unless your chapter has not enrolled any new or renewed any members that month).

- Excel file
- Word file
- Email message
- Hard copy list USPS mailed



- Mail to The Arc Tennessee 545 Mainstream Drive Suite 100, Nashville, TN 37228

3. Submit dues monthly for new and renewing members to The Arc Tennessee, People First Tennessee. Do not mail cash, please mail a **check** made payable to **The Arc Tennessee**.

4. Membership categories and dues rates are as follows:

Membership category	Amount paid to chapter	Amount paid to PF TN
Self-advocate (individual with disability)	\$5	\$1
Supporter (mentors and others without disability)	\$20	\$4
Business/corporate	\$100	\$20

## **PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER**

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

### **1. 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 mentor(s) are, and what goes on in the meetings. A full chapter has at least 5 members. A chapter with fewer members is considered a developing chapter.

### **2. 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.

**1.** Find out how other People First chapters work and learn from them. Contact People First Tennessee or another self-advocacy group who can help you get started. If you have a local People First chapter nearby invite them to visit and talk to you about starting your own chapter.

**2.** 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.

**3.** Set up a time and place for a meeting

A time and place needs to be set up for the first meeting. Find an accessible place to meet 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, restaurant conference rooms, a local Chapter of The Arc conference room, or at a public library. Make sure the day and time you meet is good for everyone or as many as possible.

#### 4. Let people know about the meeting

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

#### 5. Decide on an agenda for the meeting

An agenda is a list of what will be discussed in a meeting. The agenda lets everyone know what will 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; 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. You can use a video as a way of introducing self-advocacy to new members or have people from other self-advocacy groups talk about what self-advocacy means to them.

Chapters are not required to elect officers during their first meeting. Many chapters may wish to wait for two or three meetings. This gives everyone a chance to speak and get to know the other members before you vote.

Plan to do some fun things together as a group during the meeting. Make people feel good about being there. Have refreshments and a "social time" at the end of the meeting. Thank everyone for coming to the meeting and make sure they know when the next meeting is before you adjourn. Hand out calendars so everyone will know when the next meeting is.



#### **START-UP DECISIONS TO BE MADE**

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

##### 1. Decide on the purpose for your chapter

When everyone decides 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.

**This mission statement for People First Tennessee is: *"People First Tennessee empowers people with disabilities to have voices in addressing issues of equality that affect them"***

##### 2. 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, how dues 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**.

### 3. Decide on the goals for your chapter

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

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

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

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

### 4. Decide on how to develop team spirit

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

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



When people get together to discuss and work on issues that are important to them there is 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. A good way to develop team spirit is to make meetings and events fun as well as work. Learning and practicing good humor will help members work better together in the chapter and community as well as in their personal lives.

### 5. Decide on how to develop connections with the local community

People with disabilities are an important part of the community in which they live. They go to school, work, and volunteer 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 have the same interests as everyone else.

It is important for members to be active and interact with other individuals and groups in their community. Members can participate on Councils, Boards, and Committees. They can develop service projects for the communities in which they live. Chapter members may also participate in the People First Tennessee Advisory Council. It is also important people with disabilities learn about the community where they live and how it works. People First can help members learn by holding workshops and inviting guest speakers such as public health nurses,

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

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

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

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

## **KEEPING A PEOPLE FIRST CHAPTER STRONG**

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

Many 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 TO KEEP A CHAPTER STRONG**

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

Call, text, or email people to remind them about the meeting. Put up a meeting notice flyer and post on social media. Put the location, directions on how to get to the meeting, and the phone number of who to call for more information on the flyer.

**2. Make sure the day and time you meet is good for everyone or as many people as possible. Make sure the day and time you meet is not the same day and time when people are already involved in other things.**

**3. Make sure there is a place and something for everybody at the meeting.**

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

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

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

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

5. Always have officer meetings

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

6. Plan some fun things together.

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

The activities of People First should be in support of the goals in the mission. People First is not a support group or a recreation group. It is a Civil Rights movement group that voices concerns and offers training and self-determination activities for self-advocates.

This does not mean that People First does not have fun! We think we have a lot of fun making sure the community is a better place to live and making sure we know how to do all the things we need to do to take our place in the community.



### Section 3 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*

*Officers*

*Officer Roles*

*Officer Meeting*

### **PEOPLE FIRST OFFICERS**

The members of each People First chapter vote for their own leaders. The leaders are called officers. Only voting members of People First 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. Officers may ask mentors to assist them with his or her officer responsibilities.

## **KINDS OF OFFICERS**

Each People First chapter should have at least a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

There are two kinds of officers.

1. 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.

2. 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.
- Values and respects everyone as a person who has something good to bring and say at the meetings.
- Is responsible and goes to the officer's meetings and the members meeting.
- Let's the other officers know if they can't come to the meetings.
- Explains things to the members using simple words and examples so all the members can understand.
- Practices how to be an officer by reading and using the Chapter Handbook.
- Teaches the members how to be an officer and run meetings so they can get a chance to be a leader.
- 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.
- Learns 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.
- Attend their chapter meeting.
- Learn the parts of the meeting and how to lead the meeting and the voting.

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.

## **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.

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## **OFFICER ROLES**

### **President**

*The president is the one that leads the meetings.*

In a meeting:

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

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

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

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

The president sees that someone goes to 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 or be able to find someone who can take notes for him or her.*

In a meeting:

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

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

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

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

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

### **Treasurer**

*The treasurer needs to know how to count, add and subtract money, or the treasurer needs to find a person to assist with these tasks.*

In a meeting:

- The treasurer gives the report on the chapter's money. This report is called the treasurer's report

The treasurer collects dues and 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 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.

Money is very important to chapter's success. It keeps the group moving. Membership dues and fundraisers are vital to the life of the chapter and must be appreciated and applauded to keep the group alive and growing. Grants are another way to secure funds for a chapter's growth.

## Sergeant-At-Arms

*This position is not required but is a good example of other positions the chapter can create.*

In a meeting:

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

The sergeant-at-arms goes to the officer's meetings and helps plan the agenda for the chapter meeting.

The sergeant-at-arms keeps the meeting in order.

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.

## OFFICER MEETING

Every chapter needs to have officer meetings.

The officer meeting is usually two to three days before the members meeting. All the officers need to meet with the mentor two to three days before every chapter 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 the officer's meeting.
- How to 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 include dates, times, and places.
6. Decide when the next meeting will be. Adjourn the meeting.

Practice explaining things on the agenda so everyone can understand.



- Write the agenda in big letters on a large piece of paper and use pictures. Put this large agenda on the wall at the meeting so everyone can see it.
- Have the secretary get the minutes from the last meeting ready for the meeting. Have the secretary practice reading the minutes.
- Have the treasurer get the treasurer's report ready to give during the meeting.
- Practice being officers. Practice how to open and close the meetings, how to lead the discussion and how to have the members vote.
- Talk about any problems the chapter is having and how to solve these problems and make the chapter stronger.
- Role-play and practice in the officer's meetings on how to solve problems that come up during meeting.



## Section 4 PEOPLE FIRST MENTORS

***“Our mentors 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 a Mentor

Mentors Hints for People First

Questions to ask Yourself as a People First Mentor

### THE PEOPLE FIRST MENTOR

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

Mentors play an important role in People First even though the chapters are run by the members themselves. Mentors 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 mentors, but it is important that the members be the ones in control.

***“Our ‘mentors’ 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 mentors 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 A MENTOR

A mentor helps individual members or the group 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.

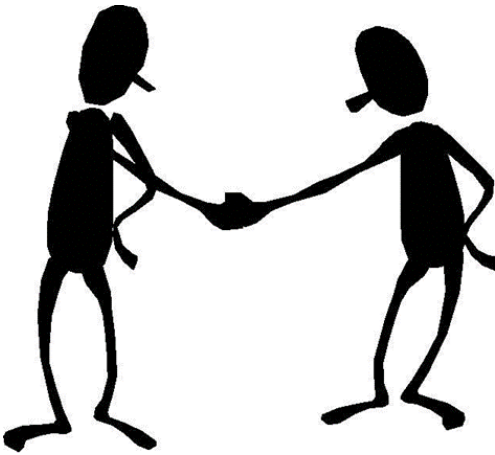
Most People First members have strong feelings about the role of the mentors in their chapter. Basically, they feel that good mentors know that People First belongs to the members and not to them. They feel good mentors help but don't try and tell the members what to do. They let them make their own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

Some of the comments by People First members about mentors:

- Mentors should help us when we need it – but not too much.
- Mentors should let members talk and run the meetings.
- Mentors should try to understand how members feel.
- Mentors should always care about us as people.
- Mentors should believe in People First.
- Mentors should not be bossy.
- Mentors 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 mentor.

1. What do you want from a mentor?
2. How do you get what you want?
3. What to do if you aren't getting what you want?



Some tips for helping members get what they need from their mentor(s) include:

**Chapter members must decide and control who the mentor is.** Members should interview the mentor and decide. It helps if the mentor has some experience helping people organize into groups and knows and respects people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

**Chapter members should be responsible for training the mentor(s) on how to be a mentor(s).**

**Chapter members should make up a contract on what the mentor(s) is supposed to do. The mentor(s) and the members should sign the contract.**

The mentor(s) and the members should follow through on the contract. A “support evaluation” can be started and meet regularly to talk about how the mentor(s) is doing.

If problems come up members should always communicate directly with the mentor and try and work, it out. Mentors are people, too and should be given a chance to learn, grow and change. Although mentors are important to the chapter, they should not outnumber the members

## HINTS FOR PEOPLE FIRST MENTORS

### *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 mentor 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 mentor by looking. A excited mentor shows involvement, facial expression, and pizzazz. A mentor must be able to laugh and cry, and to be compassionate. An excited mentor spreads the spirit of the movement to the group.

### *Having A Vision*

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

### *Finding Other Mentors*

Mentors need other mentors. It is lonely without peers to share and reflect ideas with. It is the exceptional mentor who will 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 mentors, 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 significant source of funding for people First chapters. Mentors 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. Mentors 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*

Mentors 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 mentor 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*

Mentors should avoid spending time and energy defining roles. It is easy to get caught up in word games, role games, definition games, and power games. The game of defining roles takes the energy away from what the mentor should be concentrating on. The distinction between the members and the mentor is for discussion only. In practice, the mentors and the members must put aside roles and work together. In People First the power belongs to the members. The mentor 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 MENTOR**

The following questions are a good way to gauge how you are doing as a People First mentor 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?
- Am I willing 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?
  - 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 mentors 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 mentor, but it is important to remember is that there is no such thing as an ideal mentor.

***“The Key to be a good mentor is to members help become more of who they already are- not to make them more like you”***

***-Suze Orman***



## Section 5 PEOPLE FIRST MEETINGS

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

Tips for a Successful Meeting

Holding a Meeting Using Parliamentary Procedure to Create 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 mentors to relax, take a back seat, and let the process happen without becoming leaders themselves. Mentors should feel free to give opinions, suggestions, and direction to the group, as needed, without being subtly coercive.

Some People First members may request the support of a DSP (Direct Support Professional) or other individuals. Here is a checklist for these individuals:

### Mentor Checklist for a Meeting

- ✓ I support the communication of the ideas of the person I am supporting.
- ✓ I assist by preparing ahead for the meeting.
- ✓ I am on time for the meeting.
- ✓ I follow the agenda of the person I support.
- ✓ I am discreet about offering support.
- ✓ I leave the person I am supporting alone, unless my assistance is requested.
- ✓ I sit in the back of the room.
- ✓ I do not contribute my ideas unless asked.
- ✓ I do not walk in and out during the meeting.
- ✓ I do not finish other people's sentences.
- ✓ I silence my cell phone during meetings.

People First Tennessee recommends that local chapters have at least four meetings per year. If a chapter would like to have more than four meetings, that is great! 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 mentor 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.

### TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

- Make sure that everyone knows when and where the meetings are.
- Make sure the mentor knows their role.
- 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. This could be an announcement of dues that have come in, amount spent for refreshments, and total money currently in the chapter's bank account.

### **5. Old Business**

The president leads a discussion by the group about old business. Old business includes topics 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 includes topics 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/Presentation**

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



## 9. Adjourn the meeting

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

## 10. Refreshments and socializing

### **SAMPLE AGENDA**

President calls the meeting to order - Terry

Secretary takes roll call - Judy

Secretary reads the minutes from the last meeting- Judy Members approve the minutes -Terry

Treasurer gives report on chapter money - David

Old Business, the Presidents leads the talk – Terry- Report on last month’s Convention

New Business, the President leads the talk - Terry-Do we want to write a letter to the convention hotel? Who will write the letter? What do we want at the next meeting?

Announcements: 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.

Adjourn the meeting- Terry

The next meeting is Tuesday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, at 7: OOPM at the senior center.

Refreshments and time to talk to friends

### **SOLVING PROBLEMS IN MEETINGS**

During the People First meetings problems may happen. During the officer's meetings talk about the problems that 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.

- 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 mentor talks too much during the meetings, politely remind the mentor 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 mentor in the meetings and not to the other members, the officers need to politely remind the members to talk to the members so the members can learn how to do things on their own.
  - If the members are not talking during the meetings, the officers need to think of ways to get everyone involved.
  - If a member asks a question during the meeting, the officers need to make the members question important and thank the member for asking the question. If the members question is off task, tell the member their question is important, and you will discuss it under new business on the agenda.
  - If the members seem bored in meetings, think of ways to get everyone involved and excited.
- 



## SECTION 6 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 with IDD and 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 with a disability can vote during a People First meeting.

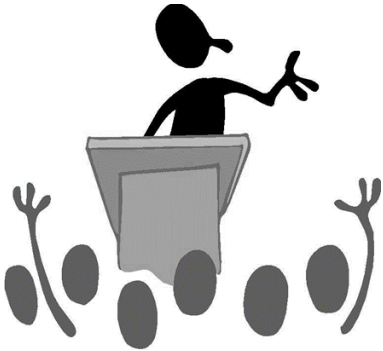
## VOTING ON CHAPTER BUSINESS

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.

1. A member makes a motion.
2. Another member seconds the motion.
3. Members discuss the motion.
4. 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.
5. 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 mentor and the current officers discuss possible candidates who are then nominated to run for office. In other chapters, any member can nominate them self 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:

1. Candidates are nominated for each office. It is ok to nominate yourself. If the candidate accepts the nomination, the candidate says, "I accept the nomination." If the candidate does not wish to accept, the candidate says, "I decline the nomination." Then, someone else is nominated.
2. Each candidate nominated may give a speech.
3. Members vote on the candidates for each office by secret ballot.
4. The votes are counted.
5. If there is a tie the members vote again on the candidates who tied.
6. The President announces the winner for each office.
7. The winner for each office may give a thank you speech.

It is important the members know and understand the election process and who is running for each office. Some hints on holding elections include:

- Chapters should elect officers every year.
- The whole chapter decides who will be their officers by voting.
- Each person running for office may 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**

Election of officers should be done by voting. There are several methods a chapter can do:

1. Using a secret ballot 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 that you would like to vote for.
2. The chapter members can close their eyes and raise their hand when the name of the person they would like to vote for name is called.
3. There could be a mentor who lets chapter members come up to them and tell them the name of who they would like to be in which position.



## **SECTION 7 WORKING ON ISSUES**

***“Chapters are stronger and function best when members work together on 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 community support services and educational opportunities.
- National Issues such as aging and discrimination.

These issues all 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, developed by the Massachusetts Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities, have helped others through the process of identifying an issue to work on and coming up with an action plan.

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

*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.

**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.

**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.

**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 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:

##### **1. 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.

##### **2. 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- Example**

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##### *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

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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 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.



## SECTION 8 RESOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### RESOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In addition to this handbook there are many resources available for People First and other self-advocacy groups. You can find resource information on our web site at <http://www.arctn.org/People-First.php>

There is also additional information on other People First chapters and resource information:

- People First of Missouri <https://www.missouripeoplefirst.org/>
- People First of Washington <http://www.peoplefirstofwashington.org/>
- People First of Illinois <http://peoplefirstofillinois.com/>



- People First of Central England  
[https://www.independentliving.org/donet/29\\_central\\_england\\_people\\_first.html](https://www.independentliving.org/donet/29_central_england_people_first.html)

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

- The Arc bibliography section at [http:// www.thearc.org](http://www.thearc.org)
- Advocating Change Together at [http:// www.selfadvocacy.com](http://www.selfadvocacy.com)
- Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) at [http:// www.sabeusa.org](http://www.sabeusa.org)

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

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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 Tennessee



This project is funded under an agreement with The Arc Tennessee and the State of Tennessee.

The Arc Tennessee and People First Tennessee value diversity and do not discriminate based on race, ethnicity, religion, age, geographic location, sexual orientation, gender, level of disability or Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

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