



The People First of Missouri Advisor Book of Information and Advice

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Advisor's Q & A

“One of the greatest privileges of People First is seeing the greatest need of this group. To open the eyes of people’s prejudices and preconceived notions of what it means to segregate, designate, distinctualize, to label people is the most horrendous activity anyone can do to another person or group of people. Everyone is a unique person and adds his or her own distinctiveness of their own creativity to life. No matter what we see here is a person who has been set upon the face of the earth to flavor it, to change it, to make it a more beautiful place. To give a unique eyesight that only through their created eyesight and voice can produce and everyone regardless of physical, mental or spiritual capacity has a place, a purpose, a character that once they are gone their like will never ever be seen again. To this we are all weighed as unique, genuine individuals. Which People First addresses the needs of those individualities that shine like the stars which are as different as each star as one snowflake is to another. THERE IS PEOPLE FIRST.”

Quote from People First of Missouri advisor, 2002.

1. What does People First mean to you as an advisor?

- Work with people to learn about their own power.
- It has been a source of inspiration and joy in the past 12 years. I have learned so much from my members.
- A chance to work with a great group of individuals, while they work on self-advocacy.
- To be there as needed, when needed.
- Helping the people get over their fears of talking at a group. When they become relax at talking with several around, it makes me so happy. Improve their self-esteem.
- A way for anyone with a disability to be given a chance to decide what THEY want for themselves.
- An opportunity to help people with disabilities be in control of their own lives and the supports necessary to them to have the lifestyle they desire.
- The opportunity to encourage and build others up and show them that their voice is just as important and powerful and effective to produce change as the next one a voice that is not heard is the only voice that cannot effect change.
- People First have been the best opportunity I have ever experienced. It has allowed me to learn from some of the most powerful people in the disability field. I love the members as a whole and thank them for educating me in the “abilities field.”

2. Why are you involved with People First?

- Because it continues to evolve as a very educated and legislatively powerful group and honestly cherish the friends and I have made with in the membership and look forward to working and playing with them.
- I feel it is an important organization to effect change and show that the only truly disabled person is the one who refuse to stand up and be heard. No one is truly less than another but everyone is important because everyone has a voice that needs to be heard.
- I enjoy the members of our chapter. They are fun to be with and I want to help people be in control of their lives. And I enjoy the relationships with the Steering Committee.
- I believe everyone has something to give others but sometime they don't know it. Once they do the want to help others feel good about themselves.
- Helping the group is able to have a meeting on there own, something they can do on their own and be proud of it.
- I think it is a fantastic group.
- To see the growth and development people gain in self-advocacy and speaking up for themselves in their lives.
- All people need to be free and content in their life.

3. How did you become involved with People First?

- In the beginning it was not a choice. As part of my job, I was asked to start a local chapter. But, since the inception of our "terrific local chapter," every year I hope and pray that the members will continue to want me as an advisor because it is such a positive part of my life.
- First through having a client that wanted to establish a People First organization and then being elected to be their advisor.
- I attended a conference session about People First and were the Futures Planning facilitator and therefore, had the opportunity to ask people if they would like to have their own support group.
- Originally, I was asked to start a group by a Program Supervisor.
- My boss asked me if I would because they just lost the other advisor. If I didn't take it over they would have to disband the chapter.
- When our chapter began I volunteered until I became an advisor.
- 1990- heard it was looking for a new advisor. Then applied to be the advisor.
- Asked advisor of another group if she needed help.

4. What was the hardest thing that you had to overcome as an advisor?

- Getting the members to accept empowerment. Understanding the organization of statewide People first and how we fit in, why we attend Steering committee meetings. Funding sources and how dollars used for statewide group where do new advisors get direction and assistance? No conscious and very confused in the beginning.
- To run the show myself. To be less conspicuous. To dictate instead of show. To get to detailed in making a meeting go. To make it move in line.
- Keeping my mouth shut and asking thinking question of people.
- Parents, guardians and home staff expecting me to tell the group what to do. Some just don't get it.
- Having the group accept me and them allowing me to help them. At first most of them would hardly talk to me. However, they went through 3 or 4 advisors in a very short time.
- My own lack of knowledge about the organization.
- Learning not to talk so much and not run the show.
- LISTENING- not forcing my values and beliefs.

5. What is the hardest thing about being an advisor?

- Getting the members to accept responsibility and make independent decisions. Getting them to act on legislation that will affect their lives and having them understand they are more powerful than professionals. The time commitment is always a balancing act.
- To not do everything for them and tell them how to do it. To let them work problems out and not solve them for them for themselves.
- Balancing Regional Center work with being an advisor can sometimes seem like a thin line and can be isolating.
- Seeing members with much potential, not using their abilities and not being able to find a way for them to want to help themselves.
- Coming up with new ideas or when group has plan something and it is not possible to do it and tell them that.
- Finding time to do everything that needs to be done.

"Have the ability to lend a helping hand, provide a shoulder to cry on, lend a listening ear, and bestow a kick as needed. Possess the ability to wear many hats, assume the numerous roles and leap tall buildings in a single bound."

Amber Adair, R-3
AmeriCorps*Vista

- I am just beginning to learn my role. As a professional I am a case manager. So I am use to listening, problem solving and verbalizing with the individual. So I am an active part of the process. But so far this role change has been a huge transition for me. Sitting back and seeing the individual s processing these issues and decisions. So I guess this is the hardest and the best part of my role so far.
- Giving up weekends.
- TIME.

6. What is the most rewarding thing about being an advisor?

- Being a part of members becoming empowered. The friends I have made. Seeing their excitement when something they do really works and boosts their confidence.
- Watching people.
- Seeing members grow and the group become more mature, them being in charge and following through with responsibilities and helping each other.
- Watching people grow and being a part of change.
- The relationship I have with the members and witnessing how empowered they have become in their lives.
- Watching the growth of self-esteem, independence, and knowledge of the members.
- Meeting people in the community.
- Seeing the group have fun and being able to do the meeting on there own.
- Seeing members grow in their confidence in themselves and seeing them want to help others do the same for themselves.

7. What do you do when you need help with you chapter, where do you turn for support?

- During the early years, I prayed a lot. Now I pray and when possible, discuss the problem with other advisors.
- Statewide President.
- Other advisors.
- Network with other chapters for brainstorming ideas or contact state advisor.
- Go to our sponsoring agency.
- Other advisors

- Talk to members, co-advisor, other advisors, community-depending on the situation.
- State officers, advisors, and other chapter members.

8. How do you get your group involved in the community?

- Our chapter has “Adopted a Highway” participated in community fairs, festivals and parades and in giving time and help to Human Service agencies.
- Candy bar sells, helping at the Trade show in the Spring.
- Various projects and fundraisers.
- Adopt a spot
- Spreading activities on participating in advocacy efforts and volunteer work.
- Telling people about community happening providing transportation.
- ADA Picnic, fundraisers, setting up information booths at stores with disability literature, parade float.
- Show them a need and then ask how they would go about solving it. Opening their eyes to what is needful in the community.
- Volunteer work, parades, town festivals, agencies, providers, we will begin going in schools this year to spread the word of PF.

9. What do you do when you feel like your having an advisor burnout?

- I meet with the officers and tell them how I feel. I then ask them what tasks they are willing to help me with. Then we start a new project.
- We have a main advisor and three assistant advisors. My assistants help do a big part of the work.
- Start losing sleep.
- Talk to other advisors.
- Take a break.
- Ensure group is handling most of the work and have others take on more responsibility.
- Usually think about why I am involved in the first place and think about what life would be like without PF. I also talk to members and other advisors to see if they can pick up more to lessen my load.

10. When do you feel it is time to let go of your group?

- I try to stay in the background as much as possible until I am asked to help the group in a specific way.
- When there is growth and development.
- When they are a mature, functioning group, knowing and demonstrating taking care of all tasks and relationships.

11. What do you do if your group starts to become dependent upon you?

- Try to get them to form a small committee to discuss whatever, develop some options and then vote on it. Only after they have voted can they discuss it with an advisor for more ideas or thoughts.
- Strive to shift the dependence upon all instead of one person that way no one is seen as more important than another and everyone is important.
- Re-look at what I'm possible doing for the people and breaking down tasks so everyone has a part and reinforce.
- Tell them it is not my group, teaches people how to take charge.
- Step back-give them more time.
- Tell them they need to try to do this on their own, or I will go and hide.
- I start assigning the members those things they are dependent upon me doing after showing them what needs to be done.

"I believe it's important if possible for advisors to fade from involvement over time, and it's important for them to be careful not to exercise control over the group, and to avoid the scenario wherein a group falls apart if an advisor isn't present. I believe advisors should be careful not to create dependency on themselves, by doing too much and controlling too much of the group's activities. Their role should be to guide and to advise, and to be willing to give up responsibilities to the group as the group becomes enabled."

Mark Satterwhite

12. What are some good sources of funding for your chapter?

- The only funding we receive is from chapter fundraisers.
- Candy bars sells.
- Raffles
- Money donated from the community organizations.
- Fundraisers and senate bill 40 boards.
- County SB40 Board, chapter fundraisers, donations from civic groups.
- Chili suppers, yard sales, and dances.

Any other ? not asked that you feel should be acknowledged ?

- I think each New Advisor needs to receive an organizational chart or told who to contact with questions, how to get training for them and members about People First. The purpose of Steering Committee and how the chapter fits in.
- The advisor can make a chapter be strong by expecting the members to learn to do for themselves after being given training and then an opportunity to use these skills. Even when they struggle, they must feel that they can try again. Once they are able to proactive the skills, they should be expected to help train others as well as learn a new sill themselves.

Be the **BEST**!!!

BELIEVE

Believe in your group. Help them realize their potential. If you believe in them and what they can accomplish, maybe then they'll learn to believe in themselves.

EVALUATE

Evaluate your group. Give them positive feedback and constructive feedback. Always let them know where you stand and where they stand.

SUPPORT

Provide your group with a supportive environment. Back them 100%. If you support them, they will support you. It makes your job easier, and overall promotes a more positive attitude.

TIME

This time enables you to get to know them as individuals - - not just as a group you advise. Share your own experiences and ideas with them. Find out what their thoughts are, what their likes and dislikes are. Expose them to as many alternatives and experiences as possible. Be available.

Members **thoughts on** Advisors

- **Know** there will be disagreements.
- **Communicate** with the members directly, not through other members
- **Be honest and smart**
- **Follow through**
- **Come to all the meetings**
- **Back us up** on the rules, when we have to point out someone's mistake
- **Advise us**
- **Ask us Questions**
- **Listen**
- **Ask us what we want you to do**
- **Take advise from us**
- **Learn what supports each person needs**
- **Be a Friend.**
- **Find ways to help everyone get involved**
- **Make sure everyone knows when and where the meeting is**
- **Don't take over for the leader**
- **Don't dictate what we should do**
- **Don't be afraid to speak**
- **Don't make decisions without members**
- **Don't assume that everyone agrees**
- **Don't talk too much**
- **Don't do too much for us**
- **PLEASE DON'T QUIT!**

Roles and Responsibilities of an Advisor

Your main function is that of an educator. An educator provides information, presents alternatives, encourages responsibility, supports creativity, and challenges people to think and grow. **In this way an advisor walks a fine line between leading the organization and giving the organization the strength to lead itself.**

Choosing an Advisor

Organizations rarely become successful without the active involvement of an advisor. Effective advising requires numerous skills normally associated with teaching or counseling and a willingness to commit time to these activities. Be familiar with the group's history and traditions. The advisor should also be familiar with the constitution and bylaws and should be prepared to assist with their interpretation. Monitor the group's functions and encourage all members of the group to fully participate, assume appropriate responsibility for group activities, and to maintain a balance between responsibilities.

The Changing role of the People First Advisor

By Charles Curtis

People First is a self-advocacy organization operation by and for people with mental (intellectual) handicaps, with help from nonvoting non-disabled advisors. People First organizations have been in existence for about a decade. Curtis describes “good” advisors as being:

- **Interested in the welfare of people with disabilities**
- **Respectful of individual differences**
- **Understanding of special needs**
- **Personable and open-minded**
- **Available when needed**
- **Committed to self-advocacy**

Their jobs, at the local level, are to help members develop group-process, decision making, and self-advocacy skills; train officers for their positions; facilitate liaison with other community groups; and help with public relations. People First philosophy envisages a time when local chapters can function without full-time advisors, using only temporary help as needed.

Advisors are often drawn from agency/ institution staffs, especially for new chapters, and this causes concern. Professionals who hold traditional views of intellectually limited consumers may be overly active in their diligence to protect and their reluctance to allow risk taking. **This can hinder individual member and chapter development. Also, conflicts of interest arise when advisors must help People First groups pursue grievances against their employers. Such conflicts can only be avoided when members are able to handle such grievance actions without advisors’ help.**

According to Curtis, only where the advisors meet the criteria listed and will provide leadership without taking control, do chapters grow in membership and competence.

Curtis, Charles. “The Changing role of the People First Advisor”, American Rehabilitation, April 1984.

Source: Rehab Brief. Vol.VIII, NO. 5 May 1985. National Institute of Handicapped Research. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, Department of Education, Washington, D.C. 20202.

ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD ADVISOR

The Meaning of the Word "ADVISOR"

AWARE

Knows what is happening with the group at all times -- problems, dates of functions, etc.

DEDICATED

Always willing to assist the organization when necessary. Enjoys being associated with the group and is very involved.

VISIBLE

Attends meetings, social functions, and other special activities of the group.

INFORMED

Familiar with the rules, policies, and regulations of the University and the by-laws and constitution of the organization. Is prepared to render assistance with their interpretation.

SUPPORTIVE

Provides encouragement and praise to group members.

OPEN-MINDED

Willing to consider new ideas and approaches although they may not totally agree with them.

RESPECTED

Earned through being trustworthy and honest and demonstrating a genuine interest in the welfare of the group.

This Advisor book of information was compiled by Amber Adair, an AmeriCorps*VISTA member for People First of Missouri. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to call (800)558-8652.