Self-Advocacy Leadership Workshop & Strategic Planning Retreat

People First of Connecticut

Facilitator’s Report

Prepared by Lydia Brown

November 2015

Photo: Retreat participants along with advisors’ board and the retreat facilitator, posing for a group photo in the conference room.
People First of Connecticut Self-Advocate Participants

Chadwick J. Sinanian
Vice President
People First of Connecticut

Varian Salters
Treasurer
People First of Connecticut

Quentin Hughes III
Secretary
People First of Connecticut

Jessica Starling
People First of Connecticut

Mary Gonzalez
People First of Connecticut

Abbey Weiss
President
MARC Guardian Angels

Wendy Rice
A NEW WAY Self Advocacy Group

Scott Knee
People First of Connecticut

Christopher Blake
Advocacy & Legislative Communicator
Sarah Tuxis Residential Services

Dennis Starling
Board Client Representative
The Arc New London County

Michael Ruzzi II
Self Advocacy Coordinator
A NEW WAY Self Advocacy Group
The Arc of Southington

Supporting Advisors

Leslie M. Simoes
Executive Director
The Arc Connecticut

Larissa Gionfriddo
Founder & Executive Director
Community Navigators, Inc.

Gretchen Knauff
Assistant Director
Office of Protection & Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities

Denise Tift
Director of Community Life & Advocacy
The Arc New London County

Walter Doubleday
Transportation Coordinator
The Arc New London County

Sandy Amato
Executive Director
The Arc Southington
Setting the Stage

WHO
11 Self-Advocate Leaders

WHERE
Four Points Sheraton Hotel in Meriden

WHEN
October 24-25, 2015

WHAT
Retreat-Style Workshop

WHY
Strategic Planning for the Future of People First CT

HOW
Leadership Development
Our Work

In only one weekend, we accomplished an enormous amount of work – from brainstorming to planning!
What does self-advocacy mean to us?

- showing the world what I can do
- backing up what you say
- practicing what you preach
- your presence
- showing up to hearings and testifying
- be willing to learn
- being helpful to others
- being equal
- respect each other
- working on my behalf to be independent
- don’t do all the work alone
- work as a team
- be nice
- getting a new job
- budgeting my cards and shopping wisely
- sticking up for my rights, dignity, and respect as an equal member of society
- speaking up
- willing to help others when they need help the most
- being kind to others
- living on my own with my roommate
- being a better person
- help people talk out things
- enjoying seeing other people
What are our goals for ourselves?

What do we want to gain or accomplish, as individuals, from being part of People First of Connecticut?

- to stop name-calling and labeling
- becoming more empowered
- help get more members
- learn more about the chapters
- help fundraise to get more money
- be more leadership for people
- be more respectful to others
- to be more independent
- becoming a self-advocate coordinator
- doing Special Olympics
- representing my hometown
- going to meetings
- celebrate in person
- make sure people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else
- being a leader
- being a teacher or guide
- want to be a leader of Guardian Angels
- to help others know how R-word hurts us
- helping others
- same rights
- good-paying jobs
- join groups similar to People First of Connecticut
Goals for People First of Connecticut

Our Top Three Priorities:

**Membership**
Recruit more members and have better attendance at events

**R-Word**
Increase public awareness about the R-word

**Disability Rights**
Learn about and advocate for other issues related to rights of people with disabilities

Other Goals for Our Group:

- traveling to other events and new places
- starting a social group for people with disabilities
- having the president at meetings
- working with Kids as Self Advocates (KASA)
- getting transportation for events
- closing institutions in Connecticut
- finding and hiring a new advisor
- closing Southbury Training School
Barriers to Achieving Our Goals

Three Most Urgent/Biggest Problems:

- **Transportation**
  - Getting people to meetings and events

- **Facilitation**
  - Facilitators or Advisors need to be better at explaining issues

- **Social Groups**
  - Lack of social groups and activities for people with disabilities

Other Barriers and Problems We Face:

- people being afraid of speaking
- disrespectful judging
- lack of communication about events
- not enough awareness of what's going on
- not spreading the word to other groups of self-advocates
- talking in circles about goals but not taking action
- be disciplined by showing up on time and giving feedback
- need to help other people with disabilities
- government trying to make budget cuts
**Getting to Know Our Group**

**Learning About Our Strengths**

- very persistent
- good with money
- see the bigger picture
- helping others
- good in math
- very persuasive
- talking to people
- reading skills
- doing powerpoint
- explaining the issues
- good at cooking
- writing letters to the editor
- being bilingual
- being a great advocate
- public speaking
- good phone skills
- having computer knowledge

**Knowing What Skills We Need**

- teaching other people
- patience
- more leadership with disability
- dealing with anxiety
Values & Principles for Our Group

- betterment for all
- working as a team
- honesty & accountability
- self-reliance
- independence
- educational
- dependability
- participating in politics
- sincerity
- responsibility
- respect
- patience/understanding
Oversight & Management of Advisor

- Advisor must sign written contract
- Advisor can request advance funds or request reimbursement
- Only president, vice president, & treasurer have control over funds
- Advisor held to specific disciplinary & accountability policy
- Any member with a concern can go to officers
- Officers expected to do research about disability events and news
- Treasurer will make regular checks of bank account
- Whole board votes to hire advisor candidate
- Officers do twice-yearly evaluation of advisor
Advisor’s Disciplinary & Accountability Policy

1. Concern is raised
   - Members can bring concern to officers

2. Officers call meeting with advisor

3. Advisor has 30 days to fix the issue

4. If issue not fixed, officers give written warning

5. Officers start looking for new advisor at 2nd warning

6. 3rd warning = termination
**Advisor Hiring Timeline**

**First Week of November**
- Post job announcement on Connecticut disability organizations' websites
- Post job announcement on job search websites

**December 31**
- Candidates must send hard copies of application packets to Hartford address by this date
- As applications arrive, Mary makes copies of each packet for all board members

**January**
- Quentin schedules interview dates
- Gretchen Knauff will be at every interview
- Officers interview each candidate as a group
- Candidates invited to attend meeting
- Board has conference call to vote on hiring decision

**End of January / Beginning of February**
- Final candidate asked to take drug test
- Final candidate provides I-9 work authorization
- Final candidate hired
Advisor Job Announcement

(This is also included as a separate attachment to the full report.)

Job Title: Advisor
Employer: People First of Connecticut
Reports To: Board Officers of People First of Connecticut (President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer)
Status: Part-Time (some nights and weekends required)
Salary: $1,000/month (fixed rate)
Location: Statewide (some travel in-state required)
Closing: December 31, 2015

People First of Connecticut is hiring an advisor to provide support for members of our organization by enabling us to fully participate in our activities and achieve our goals.

About People First of Connecticut
People First of Connecticut was founded in 1983 and is a legal nonprofit corporation. The original goals were to close Southbury Training School, advocate for the right for meaningful jobs, to close sheltered workshops, expand self determination, and assure that all people, regardless of ability or disability be treated with dignity and respect. Over the years we have seen many changes. People with disabilities are learning our rights and speaking up for ourselves. We are living more independently and taking advantage of our rights and responsibilities. People First of CT is especially proud of two things: we, along with two other human rights agencies, sued the state of CT over the treatment of people at Southbury Training School, also we fought very hard and were successful in getting CT DMR to get rid of the "R Word" and change its name to the Department of Developmental Services! Our current goals are similar to the ones we started with more than 20 years ago. We are advocating for closing sheltered workshops, educating the public about people with disabilities and educating people who have disabilities about their rights and how to speak up for themselves.

Responsibilities
• File tax paperwork on time and handle other financial tasks if asked to help by the group.
• Make phone calls when asked.
• Be up-to-date about disability news and events by other groups and inform the group’s membership.
• Observe and attend all regular officer meetings.
• Attend all group’s events.
• Provide reminders to augment (support) members in completing tasks or fulfilling responsibilities, when necessary.
• Send agendas to members and officers in advance of meetings.
• Serve as middle person to outside groups if asked.
• Actively work in partnership with officers in planning group’s direction and activities.
• Assist secretary with preparing minutes, if asked.
• Print meeting materials as backup if needed.
• Learn about history of self-advocacy and disability rights.

Traits of Good Advisors
• Is responsive to group’s needs, but only steps in or offers help when asked.
• Able to be a role model for advocacy.
• Treats people with disabilities with respect as equals.
• Communicates promptly with designated contact if sick or unable to fulfill duties.
• Treats meetings and events as own professional workspace. (Does not bring kids or outside guests unless specifically invited.)
• Does not speak during discussions or give opinions unless asked.
• Able to be well-organized.
• Has good teamwork skills.
• Has good communication skills.
• Is honest, calm, kind, patient, and respectful.

Qualifications (Required)
• Valid driver’s license in good standing.
• Access to a car.
• Available to work some nights and weekends every month.
• Knowledge of Microsoft Office suite.
• Basic social media and web design (setting up a website or blog) skills.
• Basic First Aid/CPR knowledge.

Qualifications (Preferred)
• Past experience working with people with disabilities.
• Pre-existing basic knowledge of disability history.
• Bilingual.

Application & Hiring Process
In order to apply for this position, you must send a complete application package in hard copy to People First of Connecticut at 43 Woodland Street, Suite 260, Hartford, CT 06105. You must include all of the following documentation for your application to be complete:
• Resume
• Cover letter
• Responses to job assessment questionnaire (below)
• Three (3) references
• Optional: Photo portfolio of past disability or social work.

If your application is complete, the Officers of People First of Connecticut will conduct a panel interview with you in person. Interviews will take place in January 2016. You will be invited and encouraged (but not required) to attend a People First meeting during the hiring process. Finalists will have to pass a criminal background check and a drug test before an offer will be made. The candidate selected for the position will be hired at the end of January/beginning of February.
**Job Assessment Questionnaire**
You must submit written responses to these questions as part of your application package:

(1) Can you describe your experiences with people with disabilities as friends, family members, or in professional contexts? What levels of support or needs did those people have?

(2) Imagine that the group is talking about closing Southbury Training School (a large-scale institution for people with disabilities). One person puts their head down, gets fidgety, wanders in and out, and finally falls asleep. What do you think and how do you react to this situation?
Our Events Schedule

- November 19  Board Meeting
- December 10  Holiday Party
- January 22  Statewide Meeting

*Every month, we alternate between a statewide meeting and a board only meeting.*

Future Events

**Fundraising**
- sell autographs and pictures with famous athletes
- restaurant fundraiser (split proceeds or whole proceeds)
- combine social events with fundraising
- apply for grants

**Political**
- awareness event about R-word
- campaign on transportation issues
- campaign to close Southbury
- meet with state agencies (especially DDS) and legislators about budget cuts
- Medicaid & Medicare
- customized wheelchairs
- prosthetics
- mental health and addiction
- housing

**Social**
- bowling
- mini golf
- barbecue
- movie night
- ladies'/men's outing
- camping
- slumber party
- swimming
- board games night
Planning for Future Events

People showing up + Having fun (social) + Understand issue (political) = SUCCESS

Outreach Strategies

GETTING WORD OUT

- phone calls, emails
- centers for independent living
- disability nonprofits
- social media
- flyers, mailings
- state agencies

Chris & Dennis
Contact for Political Events

Mary & Jessica
Contact for Social Activities
Lead On!

Nothing About Us Without Us

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