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Partnering with Self-Advocacy Groups on Voting

Protection and Advocacy groups and self-advocacy groups are passionate about protecting the rights of people with disabilities. It is essential for these two groups to be allies, learn from each other, and work together to make the lives of people with disabilities better.

In order to work together to improve the lives of people with disabilities, professional organizations and self-advocacy organizations must have relationships that are based on understanding, respect, and trust.

In 2005 the National TA Center for Voting and Cognitive Access developed guidelines for how to build partnerships with self-advocacy organizations. The guide was written by leaders in the self-advocacy movement and includes things to consider when contacting your self-advocacy organization, growing your relationship, making a formal agreement to work together, building the relationship

over time, and building bridges between groups.

This guide can be found on the govoter.org website at www.govoter.org/PDF/GuideforWorkingwithSelf-AdvocacyOrgs8-5-05.pdf

Project Vote Trainings

The Project Vote Voter Education Toolkit was developed by national self-advocacy leaders to help people with cognitive disabilities learn about the voting process and what to do when obstacles stand in the way of voting rights.

Between 2002 and 2004 we provided Project Vote train-the-trainer activities for self-advocacy groups in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Texas. In 2004 we started to provide training for Protection and Advocacy groups and were privileged to take the Project Vote Training to Georgia, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Tennessee.

Six months after the training in Tennessee, Kate Georgen at Disability Law and Advocacy Center reports, "This experience was a phenomenal chance for [us] to build a base of training support here in Tennessee. I maintain regular contact with my trainers and use them to help devise new outreach in their local areas. The training also allowed [us] to promote the agency as a reliable and respectable resource to the state, which is exactly what we want."

The Project Vote training team is excited to work with Utah Disability Law Center and Project HAVA to provide Project Vote training in Utah and New York this spring. We will also be leading Project Vote training for the board of Self Advocates Becoming Empowered who represents self-advocacy groups nationally.

Self Advocacy Online

The Research and Training Center at the University of Minnesota has created Self-Advocacy Online. This website is an educational and networking website for those involved in making change for people with disabilities.

You can use their national self-advocacy map to find the local and state self-advocacy groups in your area or anywhere in the United States. Visit Self Advocacy Online at www.selfadvocacyonline.org

**ALASKA**

Anchorage People First, 907-271-4196, www.pfanchorage.org

Anchorage P.F. partnered with Access Alaska to help people cast their ballots and individual members volunteered with presidential campaigns. *People First of Alaska is no longer meeting*

ALABAMA

People First of Alabama, 205-932-2240, www.pfofal.org

Regional voting conferences were hosted across Alabama. People heard speeches from local politicians, voting judges came and talked about the voting process, people tested the new voting machines. Project Vote trainer, Jeff Ridgeway, was the featured speaker and ADAP hosted a voter registration booth.

ARIZONA

People First of Arizona, 602-336-8539 ask for Monica Cooper, no website

Self-Advocacy Coalition of Arizona, 602-277-4986x302 ask for Teresa Moore,
<http://www.selfadvocacyofaz.org/about/>

Just opened a new office and are setting up a new phone system. Worked with the DD Council and Center for Disability Law to get voting information out to people.

ARKANSAS

Arkansas People First, 479-871-2753 ask for Tommy, www.arkansaspeoplefirst.org

People First partnered with the DD Council to provide Project Vote training to 60 People First members. They also hosted a voter education booth at the annual DD Council conference where they handed out information about how the voting process works.

CALIFORNIA

People First of CA, 916-552-6625, www.peoplefirstca.org

The president of People First of California provided approx 20 trainings with self-advocacy groups, parent groups, and developmental centers about the importance of registering to vote and casting your ballot. Individual members joined political campaigns.

CONNECTICUT

People First of Connecticut, 203-792-3540 ask for Laura Hastillo, www.wecahr.org/people.htm

They are very active with providing voting registration and education workshops at their state conference, statewide meetings, and local meetings. They have tested voting machines and discussed candidates who are running for office. Approximately 95% of their members are registered to vote.

COLORADO

Speaking for Ourselves, 303-232-1338 ask for Louise Todd-Stolle, www.speakingforourselves-colorado.org/

The statewide group held educational trainings about the ballot initiatives at their quarterly statewide self advocacy meetings and encouraged all 10 local chapters to do the same. The Legal Center for people with disabilities and older people partnered with the Denver chapter to host a training on voting rights.

DELAWARE

Delaware People First, 302-996-9400x105 ask for Debbi Nock, www.arcde.org/programsservices/depeoplefirst.asp

Invited the elections office to talk at their meetings and register voters. Talked about the voting process and candidates who were running for office. Testified at legislative hearings about drop in support services, respite care, transportation, employment, state budget, and the need for increase in pay for group home workers.

FLORIDA

People First of South Florida, *no phone*, <http://encore4.net/peoplefirst/>
People First of South Florida has two active chapters in Broward and Dade.

GEORGIA

People First of Georgia, 678-755-6015 ask for Cheri Mitchell, <http://ga.disabilityselfadvocates.org>

The Georgia Advocacy Office and People First of Georgia sponsored a two year voter education effort. In year one they hosted a Project Vote training for local people first officers. In year two the local People First officers trained people in their regions and handed out over 2000 voter registration forms. They also inspected local polling places before the election and created accessibility reports which they used to educate their election board.

HAWAII

No state self-advocacy group. Local groups are active at the Arc of Hawaii and the Youth Center in Honolulu.

IDAHO

Idaho Self-Advocate Leadership Network, 208-334-2178 ask for Christine Pisani, www.icdd.idaho.gov

Idaho Self-Advocate leadership Network, the Idaho DD Council, and the Idaho Protection and Advocacy worked together to create the Determined to Vote website at www.idahovotes.gov/Access/access.htm

ILLINOIS

People First of Illinois, *no phone*, www.peoplefirstofillinois.org/

Did not work on voting or elections last year.

**INDIANA**

Self-Advocates of Indiana, 812-856-5543, www.saind.org/Contact_Us.htm

Local members worked with Indiana Protection and Advocacy Services to lead 30 different trainings about voting in Indiana.

IOWA

People First of Iowa is no longer meeting. Local self-advocacy groups are active and have partnered with ID action (www.idaction.org) to host voter education trainings, practice using new voting equipment, and get involved in the Iowa caucus.

KANSAS

Self-Advocate Coalition of Kansas, 785-749-5588,
www.sackonline.org/SACKonline_Home_Page.html

SACK is a very politically active group. In 2008 they produced a video called sack the vote which can be found on their website, they hosted a voter registration drive, and they lead a series of educational trainings.

KENTUCKY

Kentucky Self-Advocates for Freedom, 859-245-0717, www.kyselfadvocates.com/

LOUISIANA

People First of Louisiana, 225-383-1033 ask for Benita Plaisance, www.peoplefirstla.org

They worked with their secretary of states office and The Advocacy Center to host voter education training across the state. 327 People First members participated in the training where they learned about their voting rights and practiced using the accessible voting machines.

MAINE

Speaking Up For Us of Maine, 1-877-207-4077, www.sufumaine.org

MARYLAND

People on the Go c/o Arc Maryland, 1-888-272-3449 ask for Sarah Sovenson,
www.thearcmd.org/programs/people_on_the_go.html

Local People First chapters have been partnering with the Maryland Disability Law Center to host voter education trainings.

MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (M.A.S.S.), 1-866-426-2253,
www.massadvocatesstandingstrong.org/home.php

Members of the state self-advocacy group attended a Project Vote train-the-trainer in the spring of 2008 and they talked to members about registering to vote at their state conference.

MICHIGAN

The self-advocacy network of Michigan is no longer meeting.

MINNESOTA

Advocating Change Together, 651-641-0297, www.selfadvocacy.org

ACT used their Self Advocates Minnesota Network to lead voter registration drives in each of their six regions. They spread the word about the importance of voting and registered 175 people with disabilities to vote for the first time.

MISSISSIPPI

My Voice My Choice, 601-982-1180 ask for Charity Drummond, www.arcms.org/index.php

Members from local chapters attend state self-advocacy meeting every 3-4 months. The state group has worked with the Governor's Office and Elections Office to host voter education trainings where people can register to vote, learn about their polling place, test the voting machines, and learn about absentee ballots.

MISSOURI

People First of Missouri, 1-800-558-8652, www.missouripeoplefirst.org

MONTANA

People First of Montana, 406-443-4896, <http://peoplefirstmt.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/index.asp>

The state chapter is getting support from Disability Rights Montana and, although the People First was not able to organize statewide voter trainings, individual members exercised their right to vote.

NEBRASKA

People First of Nebraska, 308-872-6490, *no website*

For over five years People First of Nebraska and Nebraska Advocacy Services have been working together to run voter registration drives. People First members receive training to register voters and each year they host a voter registration booth at their conference. Local chapters hand out sample ballots and have an accessible voting machine available for people to learn.

NEVADA

People First of Nevada, 775-682-9060, www.peoplefirstofnevada.org

Local chapters worked with their Secretary of State's office to have voting machines brought to their meetings so that people could become familiar with how they work.

**NEW HAMPSHIRE**

People First of New Hampshire, 603-568-2128, www.peoplefirstofnh.org

The state group co-hosted the National Political Candidate Forum in 2007. They prepared and sent to their local groups a voter's training packet that included a DVD and sent it to anyone who requested it. The DVD's contained info about voting rights, responsibilities, how to register, and how to vote.

NEW JERSEY

The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project, (732) 246-2525 x26 ask for Sam Jenkins, www.njselfadvocacyproject.org

The state group lead voter education trainings for the local self-advocacy chapters and a mock election at their state conference. The local chapters lead voter registration drives and registered over 300 people to vote.

NEW MEXICO

People First of New Mexico, 505-883-4630 ask for Susan Weiss, www.peoplefirstofnewmexico.blogspot.com

Local people first groups have been working for years to start a statewide chapter. In January 2009 People First of New Mexico was finally formed and elected Brennan Yoder from Anthony as their President. The state group is helping to start three Native American People First Chapters and get essential infrastructure in place. In the spring of 2008 leaders from the Albuquerque and Farmington chapters attended a Project Vote train-the-trainer and plan to develop workshops using this voting information.

NEW YORK

The Self-Advocacy Association of New York State, 518-382-1454, www.sanys.org

Worked with their local groups to make sure people were registered to vote and educated about local candidates as well as national candidates. Viewed voting machines and educate election officials about supporting people with disabilities to vote.

NORTH CAROLINA

The Association of Self-Advocates of North Carolina, 919-420-7995, www.asa-nc.org/contactus.htm

The state group registered people to vote and lead voting education training at local self-advocacy groups across North Carolina.

NORTH DAKOTA

Self-Advocacy Solutions, 701-739-4554, www.ndsas.org

The state group partnered with Disability Rights North Dakota, and other state organizations, to lead voting trainings for local self-advocacy groups. They talked about how the voting process works, registered people to vote, and talked about absentee ballots. Individual members learned more about candidates by attending campaign speeches and attending the National Self-Advocacy Conference. Self-Advocacy Solutions hosted election parties and organized transportation to get people to the polls on election day. People were excited about voting and many people voted for the first time.

OHIO

People First of Ohio, 740-397-6100, www.peoplefirstohio.org

The state group worked with their local chapters to provide education about candidates and register people to vote. At their annual meeting they talk about the importance of voting and hosted a series of get out the vote rallies where members met with their state representatives. Local chapters worked with their election officials to visited all of the polling places and make sure they were accessible before the November 2008 election.

OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma People First, 405-602-2704, www.oklahomapeoplefirst.org

The state self advocacy group partnered with Oklahoma Disability Law Center to provide 15 Project Vote training, register 200 people to vote, and help 20 people in a state institution to cast their ballot.

OREGON

Self Advocates As Leaders, 503-589-1664, www.asksaal.org

In 2008 SAAL worked with their state Disability Rights Oregon to write an Easy to Read Voter Guide and host three Voter Education trainings.

PENNSYLVANIA

Speaking for Ourselves, 215-923-8600, www.speaking.org

RHODE ISLAND

Advocates in Action, 401-785-2028, www.aina-ri.org

The statewide self-advocacy group partnered with the RI Disability Vote Project. At their annual self-advocacy conference they talked about the election, tested voting machines and showed people how to register to vote.

SOUTH CAROLINA

I.M.P.A.C.T. S.C. (Individuals Motivating People to Achieve Change in South Carolina), 803-935-5228 ask for Kim, <http://knucklesdsc.net/impact.html>

**SOUTH DAKOTA**

People First of South Dakota is no longer meeting

TENNESSEE

People First of Tennessee, 615-898-0075, www.pfoftn.org

Two members of the state self-advocacy group attended a Project Vote Train-the-trainer in 2008. They went to each of their 20 local self-advocacy chapters to talk about voting and help people register to vote.

TEXAS

Texas Advocates, 512-454-6694 ask for Rona Statman, www.thearcoftexas.org/ta/

UTAH

People First of Utah, 801-533-3965 ask for Marsha, www.gcpd.org/outlet/outlet.html

The state self-advocacy group partnered with the DD Council, Disability Law Center, and the Lieutenant Governors office to create the Determined to Vote Training. They provided the Determined to Vote training to 993 people throughout Utah, registered 100 new voters, and shared the training with 24 people across the country.

VERMONT

Green Mountain Self-Advocates, 802-229-2600

The state self-advocacy group developed training materials about understanding the voting process, learning about candidates and issues, and getting support to vote. They led voter education workshops at their 19 local self-advocacy groups across Vermont and at their state self-advocacy conference.

VIRGINIA

People First of Virginia is no longer meeting. Local groups are still meeting in Chesterfield, People First of Northern Virginia, and People First of Virginia Beach. People First of Virginia Beach talked about voting both before and after the election. They have a website at www.geocities.com/pfvbeach

WASHINGTON

People First of Washington, 800-758-1123, www.peoplefirstofwashington.org

They host trainings in schools where they talk about elections and voter registration with youth who are reaching voting age. They send out information so people can learn about candidates and initiative before the election. Partner with Disability Rights Washington and County Auditors to bring all the different kinds of voting machines to local chapter meetings and conferences.

WASHINGTON

Self-Advocates of Washington, 253-565-3091, www.jcchoices.org/orgs/383.html

Worked with school transition programs to educate youth with disabilities about advocacy including registering to vote. Hosted Disability Rights Washington to provide voting training for local chapters where members can learn about voting, how the government works, and test the voting machines.

WEST VIRGINIA

People First of West Virginia, 304-422-3151 x129 ask for Kevin Smith,

www.peoplefirstofwv.org

The theme of the last statewide self-advocacy conference was “I have the right to vote, volunteer, and speak for myself”. They collaborated with their Secretary of States office to test voting machines, register people to vote, and encourage people to volunteer as poll works.

WISCONSIN

People First of Wisconsin, 414-483-2546, <http://www.peoplefirstwi.org>

WYOMING

People First of Wyoming, 307-432-4033, <http://ddcouncil.state.wy.us/pplfirstwyo.html>

The majority of People First members voted in the last election. Local chapters hosted voter rights training. Training about legislative advocacy was provided at the state wide conference, local house representatives and senators spoke, and people first members advocated to end the waitlist and improve health care.