



Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered

The National Self-Advocacy Organization

Spring Newsletter, 2004

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Letter from Chester Finn, Chairperson of SABE

Overall, it has been a busy year!

In September, we had people join disability activists from across the country in the MICASSA rally held in Washington DC.

* Several board members testified in Washington and convinced President Bush to stop using the M... R... word and change the name of his council to Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities.

* SABE met with SEIU (Service Employees International United) and started to create a partnership to educate union members and the public about closing down institutions. To help change viewpoints and minds around to people not living in institutions and support for direct caseworkers.

* I joined self-advocates in North Carolina in a rally to get a person out of an institution. We were successful and the rally was featured in the newsletter published by the DD Council of North Carolina.

* SABE board members and many alternates became trainers for Project Vote.

* We made a video about voting that will be released this spring.

* I talk frequently with people from ADD (Administration on Developmental Disabilities) and have a strong connection with them. This made it possible to get scholarship money for the California conference. SABE is also working with ADD to develop national internships for self-advocates.

* In April, I will be meeting with national election officials and all of the Election Commissioners from the states. Pat Morrissey from ADD invited me, to speak about all of the

issues facing people with developmental and intellectual disabilities and voting.

* I am working with aides from Senator Harkins' office on getting direct financial support for state self-advocacy organizations.

* You should know that the BIG TOPIC of conversation at CMS (Center on Medicaid Services) conference was self-advocacy and SABE! Our hard work is paying off.

* SABE is sending out a GRASSROOTS UPDATE to all state groups after each board meeting to keep you updated.

* SABE is having a poster contest to get the word out on knowing your rights when dealing with police.

* Nine states have partnered with us on the National Training Institute for self-advocates.

I will be updating you soon on what happened at the CMS conference — the information is in Braille and it will take a while to get it written up. Also, we are working on a couple of grants.

Take care.
Chester Finn



Speaking Out for Self-Advocacy Across the U.S.A.

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Grassroots Region Reports from All 50 states including DC

Region 1

Michael Rogers & Gayle Gardner represent Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon & Washington –

Alaska – People First chapters in 5 cities are planning a follow-up meeting to a Summit they held last December. Guest facilitators Donna Lowary & Mike Rogers from WA led us in the statewide meeting that yielded priorities focusing on development of local chapters that would later become networked to establish a stronger voice for self-advocates. Twenty-four self-advocates traveled to AK's capital city, Juneau, to participate in the annual Key Campaign - a coalition of advocates, family members & providers who meet with legislators & the Governor to deliver priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

Idaho – The chapters that are in existence are being supported by PF of WA & have representation on their board of directors. There was a great turnout of ID members attending the PF conference that was held in Spokane last fall.

Montana – Since 1995, the MT Citizen Advocacy Coalition has contracted with the MT Council on Developmental Disabilities (MCDD) to support PF groups across MT. MCAC promotes self-advocacy efforts of people who have a developmental disability by providing support for existing chapters of PFMT. The contract with MCDD also pro-

vides funding for consumers to attend the annual MT Conference on Developmental Disabilities. There are currently 13 active PF Chapters in MT with a membership of over 250. As members learn the principles of self-determination, PF members can & will become stakeholders in the creation & promotion of the direction self determination takes in MT.

Oregon – Self-Advocates As Leaders (SAAL) has been creating policies & white papers. We want to have a stronger presence when the Oregon legislature meets next. We are training people on what SAAL is, voting rights, "My Voice, My Choice," self-advocacy & board membership. We are still publishing the PF Connection (stories) & a SAAL Newsletter (information) 4 times a year.

Washington State – The most exciting event for people with disabilities in our state is the passage & enactment of the Respectful Language Bill during this legislative session. PF members worked with their legislators to see the importance in using people first language in the bills & laws they develop to govern the state of WA. Governor Locke signed the bill into law March 26 with many PF members present. We have also been doing trainings on inclusion & self-determination training with local chapters. Many of our local counties are paying us to do this education & to support their local self-advocacy chapter.

Region 2

Joseph Buchroeder & Trisha Jones represent Arizona, California, Hawaii, & Nevada

Arizona – People First of Arizona elected a new board. We started a PF chapter in Tucson. There will be at least 10 people from AZ who will be coming to the conference in Anaheim. Another self-advocacy groups in AZ, OASIS, which is connected to the ARC/AZ will bring some people also. We will be working on expanding chapters when we begin our Vista project.

California – In March, the Board of PF of California, Inc. hired a Self-Determination team to develop training in self determination & an IPP Buddy System program grant from the CA Council on Developmental Disabilities. There are 72 active PF chapters & 15 self-advocacy groups who work with PFCA. The PFCA Determination team would like to see around 2,000 self-advocates around the state of CA.

Hawaii – SAND (Self-Advocacy Network on Disability) began in July 2001. Initial funding came from the Developmental Disabilities Council. Mark Romoser is the Self-Advocacy Coordinator of Hawaii Centers for IL. We were the 47th state to establish People First. The Imua Project self-advocacy curriculum is now available at Hilo High as a one-credit course. Mark helped to restart a self-advocacy group on the island of Kaua'i. They already had an issue lined up: the phone company there is balking at giving low-income people the basic "Life-line" service they are entitled to by law. Aloha.

Nevada – People First of Nevada currently has chapters in Reno & Las Vegas &

will be setting up chapters in the rural areas of Nevada soon due to joint funding from VISTA & the State of NV Division of Mental Health and Developmental Services. The NV UCEDD was able to hire self-advocates as paid VISTA members to create a state-wide PF group. The Northern NV Chapter of PFNV has been meeting since May '03, & currently has about 30 members. The chapter is working on self-determination & fundraising/community volunteering issues. The Southern NV Chapter of PFNV started meeting in January '04. There are about 20 members. VISTA members will be getting chapters started throughout the state. Look for 7 PFN members in Anaheim.

Region 3

Jason Jones & Ben Borroel represent Colorado, New Mexico, Utah & Wyoming

Colorado is helping people register for the Presidential Election. We are involved in Project Vote. We have 2 new chapters. Speaking for Ourselves, the state organization, meets every 3 months. The local chapters of PF have 15 chapters. Denver PF have pulled together forums learning about people who are running for office. The Arc of Pueblo have had fund raising workshops welcoming all chapters & they will go to chapters. CO will have about 30 people coming to the conference in CA.

New Mexico – Self-advocate Carolyn Delgado & advisor Mike Allen made a presentation to providers in Albuquerque tracing the history of self-advocacy & self-determination in NM. We emphasized that the story is still unfolding since NM has yet to apply for a self-directed waiver. Our state's single "comprehensive" self-directed waiver will include a wide array of self-directed services for many disability populations. NM applied for a Robert Wood Johnson Cash & Counseling Grant that would be used to design a "comprehensive" self-directed demonstration waiver to support its implementation statewide & across disabilities.

Utah – Fifty self-advocates will be going to the CA conference from UT. There are 21 chapters from St. George to Logan. PF/UT helped to pass a bill that self-advocates will get computers when the state of

UT retires their old computers. Arc/UT has the software to put on these used computers.

Wyoming – People First of WY board members are planning their state conference August 27-29, '04 in Laramie with the theme being "Stand Together For Our Rights". We are learning more about self-determination. We just became a non-profit in March & are working on a grant proposal through WY Developmental Disabilities Council to make our state chapter & our local chapters stronger. At the present time, we have 5 active chapters & hope to start at least 3 more this year. Plans are being made for 9 people to attend the conference in CA.

Region 4

Julie Bleeker represent Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota & South Dakota.

Kansas – The Self Advocates Coalition of Kansas has 20 active PF chapters. They have been working with the legislative system trying to help people get out of life what the self-advocates want. They are working on some grants.

Missouri – On April 14, '04 PFMO co-sponsored a rally in our state capitol. The Governor, several Senators, Representatives & other interested parties spoke to the multitude of people. In a unified effort, we marched around the capitol building twice. After this, people went into the building to find their legislators to tell stories & advocate on the issues. The House just passed a bill to cut Medicaid significantly. There is no better time for self-advocates to speak up for ourselves & let the legislators know that we will not accept moving back in time.

Nebraska – PFNE has 13 chapters & one affiliate chapter. 12 people plan to attend the conference in CA. April 16-17 we will meet to plan the 26th annual state convention. Our main project is improving poverty levels by promoting supported employment. We have developed a peer mentor program. We are working to improve services by promoting the "Real Choice" /self-determination program. We are working to change the format from meetings that focus on a person's disability to meetings that focus on a person's strengths & what that person wants to achieve. We will seek the support of the

Director of Developmental Disabilities in changing funding, find a senator to sponsor a bill that will shift the funding dollars from segregated environments to support employment & continue to gain allies from other advocacy groups & providers.

North Dakota – People First of ND is waiting on a grant to start a PFND state office. They do have active local chapters.

South Dakota – We are trying to get grants in order to pay the 4 state regional reps. We want to pay the national regional rep, Julie Bleeker, to travel to the states that she represents to teach people what she is learning at the national SABE meetings. If they get grants, Julie will also be talking with people who work with people with disabilities. The annual SD state conference will be held May 13. There are approximately 18 local PF chapters in SD. Julie & her husband Mark will be attending the national conference.

Region 5

Todd Gatewood & Betty Williams represent Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio & Wisconsin.

Illinois – PF/IL gave Project Vote training recently & have had three different trainings: "Reaching My Own Greatness", "My Voice, My Choice" & "Leadership training". Due to the trainings, people are beginning to speak up, and advocate for themselves as well as each other. IL has about 40 chapters in 3 regions. They are working on training to learn how to be your own guardian. PF/IL has been working to keep a state institution closed. A student is helping to network computers so all board members can contact each other. Donations of computers have been given from big corporations – plus a booklet has been developed to help self-advocates understand their computer. PF/IL & Arc/IL will be working on "Advocates for Change – Do the Right Thing" Campaign. 6-8 people plan to attend the CA conference.

Indiana – Self-Advocates of Indiana's state board members attend Board Development meetings quarterly. We have 10-12 active chapters. Chester Finn will be coming

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to visit us in May. One of our initiatives is for statewide training for direct care staff. We are on a committee with Protection & Advocacy being chaired by one of the members of Protection & Advocacy & it's about how the criminal justice system treat people with disabilities.

Iowa – PF/IA began with a steering committee in '01 after Todd Gatewood (PFOH) came to IA to share info & to provide support. A board was quickly formed & has been meeting every 2 months since Spring of '02. We have partnered with the Developmental Disabilities Council & the Secretary of State's office to promote awareness of legislative issues, voting rights, & the basic "how to's" on using voting machines & speaking to legislators. Local chapters are developing. Our 2nd annual conference & business meeting was in April. We just received a grant from the Developmental Disabilities Council to develop our membership & create & implement a virtual disability community over the internet as a way of joining people with disabilities from all over the state together to share questions & concerns. PF/IA members include & represent ALL disabilities. People with disabilities make the decisions.

Michigan – MI/Arc received a grant to provide a "train the trainers" conference called "Shifting the Power" to promote awareness through our RICC & council network about the newly trained individuals. RICCs have conducted local workshops with the "Shifting the Power" presenters. The council also supports the MI Self-Advocacy Network that planned a Self-Advocacy Conference April 19-20, '04. Also a grant on self-determination was given. There are over 23 chapters in MI. –

Minnesota – (Insert Rally Picture) In the Twin Cities of Minneapolis/St. Paul MN,

the self-advocates of ACT & PF/MN were involved in a rally on March 26 insisting that negotiations be made between the city government & the transit union in order that the union strike end & the city transportation's wheels begin to roll again. People with disabilities have lost their jobs without bus transportation. Gloria Steinbring, past SABE representative, spoke out at the rally as well as many others. Some believe that it is not a money issue but a value issue. –

Ohio – We just had our state conference in March. The Theme was "Rocking into Advocacy". OH is trying to get the Medicaid Buy-In. –

Wisconsin – PF/WI has launched a campaign to stop the exploitation of people with disabilities through sub-minimum wage licenses in our state. We are also working with other organizations to downsize or close sheltered workshops. Our first state institution (of 3) is in the process of closing & we are helping with that through Welcome Home boxes & a resettlement project with faith communities. We will be sending 16 people to Anaheim. WI has 18 local SA groups.

Region 6

Gatha Novis Logan, Jr. represent Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina & Tennessee.

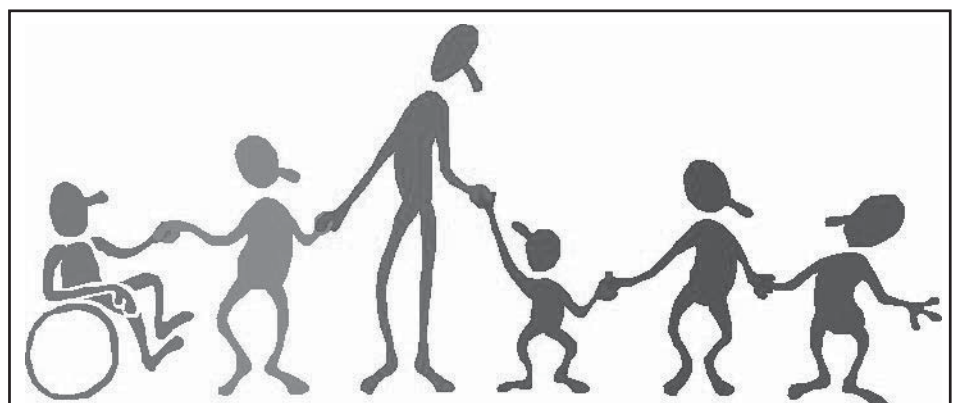
Alabama – Of 4 institutions, 3 have closed. Only one remains open! The last institution continues to be downsized. PF board & local leaders have been involved in Shifting the Power-My Voice My Choice. PF Board/Grassroots committee has been meeting about strengthening the PF Regional Teams. PF/AL will be working with local chapters. PF publishes their first newsletter.

Florida – Approximately 2 years ago, a group of self-advocates came together to form the Southern Movement for Independence, FL's self-determination organization. The board has met with the Secretary of the Division of Children and Family & the Director of the Developmental Disabilities program. The

board has written to the Governor & legislators regarding issues concerning people with developmental disabilities. The board has helped establish & strengthen local groups. We planned our second self-determination conference last year with over 700 people attending with the support of Wilson Resources Incorporated as well as the very generous financial support of the Developmental Disabilities Council. SMI is in the final stage of hiring its first Exec. Dir.

Georgia – David Mapp, VP for PF of GA & 10 other people from GA will be attending the conference in CA. PF/GA will be planning their '04 State Conference, held once a year with about 350 people attending. Important dates: June 14, Long Road Home March & Freedom Rally from Central State Hospital to state capitol. June 22, Freedom Rally, 5th year since Olmstead decision. Purpose: public awareness of people in state hospitals & nursing homes, GA not in compliance with Olmstead, empowering people with disabilities their voices count & their votes make a difference. "We Support One Another"

Kentucky – Kentucky Self-Advocates for Freedom, Inc., a new state non-profit led by & for people with developmental disabilities was incorporated in KY in August '03. KYSAFF, Inc. is governed by a Board & is presently comprised of 13 people with disabilities. Some of the goals of KYSAFF, Inc. are: self-advocates speaking up for themselves to teach, coach, support other self-advocates speaking up for themselves; self-advocates knowing & exercising their rights; informing/educating the general public about rights, needs & issues regarding people with developmental disabilities, self-advocates being involved in decision making forums regarding policies that impact people with developmental disabilities, & advocating for



funding for services/supports on behalf of people with developmental disabilities. There are 5 chapters of KYSAFF with 4 others being established. KYSAFF, Inc. has both individual membership & local chapter membership. Anyone can become a member of KY Self-Advocates but only people with disabilities can vote or hold an office.

Mississippi – My Voice My Choice is new to the state of MS. The Arc was awarded this grant through the CDD. The 5 trainers made the curriculum MS specific. My Voice My Choice has 33 participants throughout the 82 counties in MS. We asked trainees, “Why are we here?” “To learn” was one of the many answers. We introduced 4 words to the trainees: self-advocate, advocate, self-determination, & community integration. A gentleman in the group shared the best idea to start a scholarship fund to help people with developmental disabilities to go to college. We are grateful to the MS CDD for their financial support of this project. We are pleased with the response of the self-advocates.

North Carolina had a conference in Winston Salem. About 600 people were in attendance. SABE & NC will be working together on a grassroots-organizing project.

South Carolina has 26 self-advocacy groups & is developing a statewide self-advocacy association. A statewide conference was held January '04. Over 250 self-advocates attended. Chris Burke of TV series “Life Goes On” was a keynote speaker & Chester Finn, Chairman of the SABE, was also a keynote speaker.

Tennessee is using the Project Vote material. We have a TN Voters group. We are using the materials to recruit people. We will be doing a presentation at the TN Disability Mega Conference in June. We continue to work on an Olmstead Plan, had 5 state of the state Olmstead Summits where participants learned about what is going on in TN as well as had the opportunity to write letters to legislators in support of MiCassa. We also asked the Gov to establish a taskforce to work on an Olmstead plan for TN. There are 3500+ people on the waiting list to receive services. TN Protection & Advocacy filed a lawsuit on their behalf & PFTN intervened. We are hoping to settle. Three Developmen-

tal Centers remain open. We are still trying to get people into the community.

Region 7

Bill Byrne & Victor Robinson represent Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia & West Virginia.

Delaware - The New Castle County group consists of about 50-70 members who meet monthly at MBNA, America where many of the individuals are employed either in competitive or supported employment. MBNA has been very kind in letting us use their facility. Topics this year include employment opportunities, transportation, independent living & housing. We have guest speakers to talk about these & other issues. A second group draws about 30 members from our lower 2 counties. A conference will be held later this year developed by DEPF. Members testify at legislative hearings on services impacting people with disabilities.

Maryland – We are now in the process of moving people from state residential centers & nursing facilities into the community with proper individual support. We are trying to be sure people are truly in the least restrictive environment. We are now pushing for another SRC to be closed in 2 years.

New Jersey – The Seeking Ways Out Together Team (SWOT) is a group of self-advocates from NJ working to get people out of the state institutions since 1991. Most of us have lived in institutions & nursing homes. We have 22 members with different disabilities from all over the state. We have helped to close 2 institutions in our state. We are now working with our State Olmstead Plan helping brothers & sisters return to the community. We are also working with ADAPT to get MiCASSA made a law. We are proud of the work we have done & we are going to stay together until there are no more institutions in New Jersey. FREE OUR PEOPLE!



Gloria Steinbring speaks at transportation rally in Minnesota.

Bonnie Schuller, a SWOT member, says, “I lived my whole life in an institution. But now I live by myself in a house with 2 roommates. I am happier than before I moved out of an institution. My staff is very nice & helpful. I am so happy to live in my apartment.”

Pennsylvania – The Western Region of PA’s Speaking for Ourselves has been involved in the Voter Mobilization Campaign making sure people with disabilities are registered to vote in the National Election. Also, we have been working with Centers for Independent Living to develop a stronger working relationship & to join forces on issues important to us. We have been working on the development of a stronger self-advocacy network in the western region of PA & have self-advocacy groups in 8 counties. We continue to learn about & connect groups to each other. We plan to work with these self-advocacy groups in the region & hold a regional self-advocacy conference this coming year.

Virginia – Northern VA self-advocates have been working very hard to make their

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voices heard. There are 4 PF chapters in VA. A very lean time for money & budgets, decisions are being made regarding funding programs that affect work, day programs & housing options. Students graduating from school are being placed on waiting lists for services since money is no longer funded for needed programs. Community Based Medicaid Waiver funding is needed to ensure services continue for work & residential. Self-advocates are aligned with the Arc/Northern VA & various other groups to go before County supervisors & VA state legislators to make their voice count.

Washington, DC – Project ACTION! is DC's regional self-advocacy coalition in which SABE region 7 representative Victor Robinson & SABE alternate Robert Kennedy are active, are preparing testimony for City Council, & MD Legislative hearings, & are participants on both DC's & MD's Developmental Disabilities Council; the Mayor's Committee on people with disabilities; the IL Council; University Legal Services' Advisory Board, which is DC's P&A office; the city's Fatality Review Committee that reviews circumstances surrounding the death of individuals receiving services; the DC State Policy Council on Family Supports; & a variety of boards & commissions. Our group has worked, for the past 2 years, on projects to improve health care for people with disabilities & to increase the sensitivity of police in working with people with disabilities. We currently are working with the DC Rape Crisis Center & Kennedy Institute on a project about preventing violence against women with disabilities helping hospitals & police to respond better when women with disabilities are raped. ACTION members also started a chapter of Toastmasters to continue to improve speaking & communication skills. We had a recent meeting with the awesome SABE representatives from NJ & their advisors & look forward to working closely with them in the future. Members Ricardo & Donna Thornton are being asked to speak at a number of advocacy & parenting events, following the airing of the movie Profoundly Normal, made about their lives.

West Virginia does not have a statewide

organization at this time. There are about 6 local PF groups in the state. PF in WV has had an annual conference for the past 10 years. Last year they focused on self-determination issues with 100 people attending. Self-advocates have attended Partners in Policymaking & the Leadership program. WV has a statewide coalition called the Fair Shake Network that includes parents of people with disabilities & people with disabilities themselves & they have an annual conference. They are working with the state legislators & are doing some work with national legislators. Statewide Independent Living meets every other year involving people with disabilities of all types. They have a Disability Caucus. This year they are doing a mock legislature for three days. On the last



day they have permission to use the house chambers for their mock legislative session.

Region 8

Chester Finn & Sandy Houghton represent Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island & Vermont.

Region 8 Report: The states in our region get together every 6 months for a 3-day gathering. These 7 states have been meeting for over 5 years. We decided to pick a name for ourselves - N.E.A.T - North East Advocates Together. We are creating a joint timeline that will be shared at the CA conference.

People First of CT is planning a conference called Operation Respect, about bullying & how to prevent it. A tragedy happened last year when one of their leaders was murdered. It was a hate crime. Ricky Whistnant, the man who died, was assaulted

because he had a disability. Because Ricky was murdered, PFCT is working to pass a hate crimes bill that will add disability to the hate crimes law. This is a very personal crusade for our members to honor his memory & to also overcome our fears. We have the support of Service Employees International Union & a lobbyist. This is of great help to us. See an article written collectively at our last regional meeting & printed in a CT newspaper in another part of this newsletter.

Speaking Up For Us of Maine celebrated their 10th anniversary. Important issues addressed were exploitation, voting, independent living & ADA. Several self-advocates trained by Project Vote are teaching voting workshops around the state.

Mass Advocates Standing Strong developed a business plan based on their strategic plan. They are offering a Self-Advocacy Leadership Series & a *Tools for Tomorrow* Project. MA is closing down its big institutions. Over the past year, MASS has been supporting its members of the Abilities Club at Fernald (institution) to transition into the community.

People First of New Hampshire – NH now has 14 local self-advocacy chapters. The oldest group is celebrating its 20th year this fall. This last year, we've spent time telling our personal stories & educating others about community living in comparison to life in institutions & other segregated settings. This was in response to a farmstead opening up for people with disabilities in NH. We have feared that this setting would be a re-creation of another Laconia State School. To read a feature article about our - visit The NH Challenge at: www.nhchallenge.org/archives/spring03.pdf PFNH was featured last summer on the Tolerance.org website – a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center to fight hate & promote tolerance. Visit this link: www.tolerance.org/news/article_tol.jsp?id=847. PFNH has been active with elections & with having a voice about major changes headed our way in our state about the way in which services for people will be different. A statewide survey about the advisor's role is done & results will be available on our website. Three self-advocates have recently begun working as con-

Signing off...

Dear advocates, SABE board members and support personnel,

After 8 years of serving on the SABE board I am proudly stepping down. It has been a long hard 8 years that all started in Tulsa People First conference. I truthfully did not know what to expect. I spent countless nights in hotels and spent some nights in airports, however SABE did change my life from working at a sheltered workshop to a gas station and my final stop TCRC serving people with Developmental Disabilities. On the other side of the coin, I leave with some thoughts for all advocacy groups to think about. The fight continues to close down institutions but I have not seen self-advocacy groups aggressively address the problem about community supports and waiting lists in many states. Getting a person involved in a self-advocacy group is not the solution for community support, it is only a start. The local, state and national advisors need to be given a lot of credit. Many advisors are volunteers or paid very little. Self-advocacy groups across the nation owe a lot of credit to them, but very little is ever given. Thank you advisors and support personnel! I must pass along a lot of credit to People First of CA. They pulled off the national conference in a high cost area and are bringing in more people than any other Conference. Congratulations PFCA and Supported Life for all your hard work! Last of all think about the word "Self Advocate". This is a term used in this movement to describe a person with a disability that advocates, to me every one is a self-advocate including people with and without disabilities. This is not the end for me - it is just the beginning.

Joseph Buchroeder
Past Region 2 Representative

Self-Advocates then describe all the rights & responsibilities that are important to them. The video ends with 3 short stories that demonstrate the rights in everyday life. *Our Bill of Rights* is an excellent training tool for people with disabilities, support staff, agency boards & the public in general. Please contact Green Mountain Self-Advocates at gmsa@sover.net for more info. –

Region 9

Ricky Broussard & James Meadours represent Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma & Texas. –

This Spring, Region 9 met for the first time. All 4 states got together to talk about issues important to help support local & state chapters of PF. James Meadours & Ricky Broussard did a shortened training on voting & July Petty presented at a training. The whole group saw what common ground we have. We came together to make our Region stronger in self-advocacy & to give people encouragement on issues important to them. We will have annual Region 9 meetings but will set up conference calls in between the meetings.

Arkansas PF has set five statewide goals for the year 2004. They are: we will provide support for chapter growth & development, we will support people with disabilities who live in institutions, nursing homes, & group homes to become independent & find alternative living options of their choice, we will educate people with disabilities & the general public about self-determination for everyone. AR/PF bridges organizations & government for legislative support. AR/PF will implement a sound financial plan for the future. Four committees to accomplish these goals include executive, education, advocacy & public relations. Reaching My Own Greatness, created by PFWA, is being taught to spread the word about self-determination!

Louisiana – We have been giving ongoing support to the local chapters to become more strong but the providers are not supporting them to become more empowered in their livelives. LA has 23 self-advocacy chapters now. PF/LA will have their conference this year. The president of PF/LA will be at-

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sultants for PF of NH to focus on legislation, training, leadership & various presentations about self-advocacy. About 40 people from NH plan to attend the national self-advocacy conference in Anaheim. Visit us at www.peoplefirstofnh.org

Self-Advocacy Association of NY is working with their state Commissioner to start a Speaker's Corp that hopes to become the umbrella for all trainings that are done across the state. Their mentorship project is training mentors to go into homes & agencies to tell people what options they have for living & working.

Advocates in Action from RI began their 9th year-long leadership series in September. In August, 150 people attended their first annual No Talent Show/Dinner Dance. In July, 225 people attended their 4th annual Beach Bash. They have T-shirts for sale & materials to share at www.aina-ri.org.

Green Mountain Self-Advocates of VT produced a video called our Bill of

Rights. In August, they held a 10 Year Celebration of the Closing of Brandon Training School. VT has no institutions & no sheltered workshops. Recently they trained 10 teams to teach a series of 6 self-advocacy workshops.

Vermont – Green Mountain Self-Advocates: Our Bill of Rights! Video *Do you ever feel stuck trying to explain what the word "rights" means? Do you feel frustrated because many people with disabilities talk about speaking up for their rights but have a hard time explaining what that means? Do you want to teach people about their rights but are not sure where to begin?* We felt the same way & decided to make a video to help our members understand their rights & learn how to speak up about them. The script for *Our Bill of Rights* was written by self-advocates & hired the Awareness Theater Company to help us make the video. Actors in the video are self-advocates. This 18-minute video begins with a short history lesson about the United States Bill of Rights.

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Remembering Ricky Whistnant

Ricky Whistnant, a 39-year-old man from Hartford CT left us in a tragic way. Our memory of him is powerful because he stood strong for what he believed in. Ricky was a self-advocate leader for people with disabilities. His life was filled with gifts to us. He earned the Peter Kirsche Award for Self-Advocacy from The Arc/CT, Inc. Members of N.E.A.T. North East Advocates Together wish to share what we remember of Ricky, how we all feel about his life, &, about his sudden reason for leaving us. This letter was published in the Hartford Courant. This CT newspaper has won national recognition for reporting on disability issues & is the largest paper in the state.

Dear Editor,

Ricky Whistnant was killed because he was different. We find this whole tragedy absolutely uncalled for. It makes us angry & hurt because we thought the world had grown up. It's not like we're living in medieval times when people with disabilities were always being made fun of & experienced segregation & discrimination.

We need to advocate for living together in peace. If we lived in harmony & peace Ricky would have been more accepted in his community.

We have to make our streets & homes safe. & get tougher hate crime legislation so this doesn't happen to people with disabilities. It doesn't make any sense. We can't believe nobody knew what was going on, that people were harassing him. The guy was just out buying his groceries. We can't believe nobody helped him.

We are sorry for Ricky's family & friends. We are sorry for their loss.

We think that people with disabilities need to set an example for the community by how we treat each other. We need to make sure our government & programs that look out for people's lives do not cut supports for people with disabilities. We have to seriously look at how society is treating people with disabilities.

We want justice. We have the right to not be beaten up, picked on, called names & murdered. We want people to be nice to us & if something is wrong sit down & talk about the problem. We want to believe that if we report that something is wrong that people will listen & take action.

This kind of behavior cannot be tolerated. People have the right to be safe. Society needs to be completely educated on what having a disability is like. We want to educate the public, especially teenagers & children, that people with disabilities are people first.

Carol Grabbe & Chad Sinanian from People First of Connecticut,

Ed Bielecki, Anne Fracht, Bonnie Forsyth & Douglas Russell from Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong, Sherry Howes, Jodi Benvie, Laura Antranigian, Gayna Cook, Maryanne Preble & Marie Fearon from Speaking Up For Us of Maine, Tammy Mills, Roberta Gallant, Janet Hunt-Hawkins & Bob Getchell from People First of New Hampshire, Chester Finn & Clint Perrin from Self-Advocacy Association of New York

Deb Griffin Kney, Kevin McHale, & Dianne Ross from Advocates In Action of Rhode Island &, Dawn Arsenault, Patty Grassetto & Karen Topper from Green Mountain Self-Advocates of Vermont

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tending the conference in CA.

Oklahoma PF has been working to educate high school teens what self-advocacy is & to help them to become more empowered in their young lives. Students shared their hopes & their dreams & hopefully those hopes & dreams can become reality.

Texas – People First of Texas is doing Project Leadership Vote. We are also doing My Voice, My Choice. In TX, we are writing a grant proposal for self-advocacy training through the Developmental Disabilities Council. If we get the grant, we will have self advocates training for 3 years to make our chapters stronger.



Visit our website at:
www.sabeusa.org

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