



Disability Rights Legislative Day 2016

by Jason Mize, Boone County Chapter, with support

On March 10, 2016, People First of Missouri chapter members from across the state joined hundreds of others at the capitol for Disability Rights Legislative Day. The theme of the day was, "Freedom to Choose My Own Path." It was good to see so many friends in advocacy all around us and with us!

The day started with a rally. People filled the rotunda, and we heard from legislators and advocates who talked about legislative bills filed this session that could improve our lives and our ability to choose our own paths.

Rob Honan with the Governor's Council on Disability moderated the rally. Missouri Lieutenant Governor Peter Kinder welcomed the group to the capitol. And Assistant Attorney General Brian Weisel, the newly appointed liaison for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, spoke to the crowd.

Chuck Graham, a strong disability advocate and former state representative and senator, talked about the importance of voting and encouraged us to meet with our legislators later that day.

-continued on page 4

A crowd gathers in the rotunda for Disability Rights Legislative Day. In this photo, Lieutenant Governor Peter Kinder, one of many speakers, welcomes the group.



People First of Missouri is Strong and Active

People First members and chapters are busy learning, giving, and growing. We make a positive difference in our communities.

In this Issue

- Disability Rights Legislative Day 2016, p. 1 and continued on p. 4
- President's Message, p. 2
- Steering Committee Report, p. 3
- Chapter Updates, p. 5-7
- Photos from Disability Rights Day and other PFMO events, p. 8

Message From the President

by Cathy Enfield, President

Happy Spring Everyone!

Spring is a time for renewal, growth, and preparing for the months ahead, which is what I want to encourage People First of Missouri to do. This is an election year, and it appears the issues and candidates may affect our lives a lot. As advocates, we need to get ready if we want our voices to be heard this November.

One of the main things we need to do over the next few months is to get ready to vote. This means a lot more than just making sure you are registered to vote. It also means talking to candidates at the local, county, and state level about issues that are important to people with disabilities, and then sharing what you find out with People First. This way, important information can be made available to everyone. We will talk more in the near future about how to make this work effectively.

Voting is the single most powerful way we have to advocate. It is both a right and a responsibility, and

one that should not be wasted. This means not only do we make sure we vote in our elections, but also that we must make sure we know who or what we are voting for and why the issue is important to us. This is called making an informed vote and it requires a little work.

Steering Committee members were fortunate to receive some very good training at our last meeting about how to talk to our legislators. This skill is valuable and helpful whether you are advocating for a bill or getting information from a candidate about their position on disability issues. I encourage our Steering Committee representatives and advisors to share this information with chapter members. Help your members learn the skills and find opportunities to use them this year.

So this spring, I am encouraging and challenging you to plant the seeds and do the work in your chapters and communities to support people to prepare to make informed votes in the upcoming elections. While it is spring now, it will be November before we know it. I encourage everyone to learn about the issues and candidates and work to get as many people to the polls as possible this fall. My goal for this November is to have the biggest harvest of votes cast by people with disabilities in the history of Missouri. I hope it will be one of your goals too. •



People First of Missouri

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Steering Committee Spring Meeting Update

Chapter representatives come together to learn about and participate in the legislative process

The People First of Missouri Steering Committee met March 9, 2016 for its regular quarterly meeting. The meeting gave members updates on disability related legislative matters and provided basic training on how to share information with legislators.

Cathy Brown, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at Paraquad, led a discussion about what's important to PFMO Steering Committee members, policies that relate to the issues, and bills or budget items that go along with them. Some of this legislative session's bill or budget items include (as of 5/5/2016):

- HB1565-asset limit (passed House, passed Senate committees, awaiting Senate floor vote and Governor's signature)

- SB925-Ticket to work/Missouri HealthNet Buy-In Program (in Senate committee)

- HB 2778-Guardianship reform (Introduced in House and sent to committee)

- Medicaid expansion/funding services

- SCR60-Rights of People with Cognitive Disabilities Technology and Information Access (on Senate calendar, awaiting floor vote)

- SB745-workplace discrimination (stalled in Senate committee)

Andrew Lackey, Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council (MO DDC) Public Policy Specialist, reviewed the legislative process with Steering Committee members. He

also gave suggestions on how to share their thoughts with legislators. Roger Crome, Vice-President of PFMO, led members in a role-playing exercise to practice sharing their messages with legislators.

Afterwards, Valerie Huhn, Director of the Missouri Division of Developmental Disabilities (MO DDD) gave the committee an update on the Division. She reported that 360 people remain in all of the HAB Centers combined, and that there is no longer a waiting list.

After lunch, individual Steering Committee members traveled to the Capital building to meet with their legislators. In the evening, the Steering Committee reconvened and conducted their normal business meeting. •

Below left: Cathy Brown (Paraquad) leads group discussion to find which issues are most important to the Steering Committee. Below right: Members role-play skills needed when speaking to a legislator as the committee listens.



Message From the People Newsletter



Left to right: People First of Missouri chapter members waiting to speak to Senators and their staff members, meeting Representative Stephen Webber, and participating in the disability rights rally in the capitol rotunda.

Disability Rights Legislative Day 2016, continued from page 1

Cathy Enfield, People First of Missouri president, talked about causes we support and the importance of self-advocacy. She argued that people with disabilities should not have to live in poverty, and talked about the need to raise the asset limit for Medicaid eligibility. She also spoke about her belief that people with disabilities should have access to technology, saying people need technology to connect to the modern world and keep them from being segregated by the digital divide.

Following Cathy, Representative Kevin Engler talked more about the need to increase the Medicaid asset limit. "It's been \$999.99 since 1972!" Engler said. The cost of living has gone way up during that time, but people who depend on Medicaid are still not allowed to have more than \$999.99 or they lose benefits they need to live. Representative Engler filed House Bill 1565 this year to raise the asset limit. It passed the House and is now in the Senate.

Stephanie Briscoe, a mother and member of the Missouri

Developmental Disabilities Council, talked about the need to strengthen guardianship law to protect the dignity of people with disabilities. Reg Turnbull, a Jefferson City attorney, talked about the need for laws that make full guardianship a last resort and keep people who are assigned guardians from harm. (Since the rally, Representative Jim Neely introduced House Bill 2778 to strengthen guardianship law.)

Chris Worth of Paraquad fired up the crowd with an impassioned declaration of civil rights for all people. He spoke in support of Ticket to Work legislation filed by Senator Scott Sifton. Senate Bill 925 would strengthen the Ticket to Work program so people with disabilities who depend on Medicaid can work without fear of losing their coverage.

Senator Eric Schmitt revisited us at this year's rally. Schmitt sponsored the ABL Act that became law in Missouri last year, making it possible for people with disabilities to set up special savings accounts and not lose Medicaid coverage, which will help

us be able to choose our own paths!

Stella Vanvacter shared from her life experience about "Money Follows the Person." After over three years in a nursing home, she now lives in the community with her husband. She thanks the "Money Follows the Person" program, which helped her relocate to the community.

After the rally, we went to visit our legislators. Boone County chapter members talked to three representatives from our area. We introduced ourselves and thanked them for passing HB 1565 to raise the asset limit. We shared information about the guardianship and Ticket to Work measures. All three legislators were supportive. Our senator was unavailable, but we were able to leave information with his staff. Members from other People First of Missouri chapters also met with their own legislators.

Overall, it was a great Disability Rights Legislative Day, and we felt our voices were heard! •

PFMO Chapter Updates

Boone County

People First of Boone County continues to meet and discuss local and statewide issues. Also – what we can do about them.

In February, Jeff Johnson and Jason Mize presented for Partners in Policy Making. We talked about the self-advocacy movement, and how our chapter is involved in advocacy at the local and statewide level.

Also in February, we co-hosted a disability issues forum for city council and mayoral candidates. The main sponsor was the Columbia Disabilities Commission, and there were several other partners. There was a good showing at the forum. The candidates were asked questions about accessibility, transportation, housing, and inclusion of people with disabilities in decision-making.

In March, several of our members went to Disability Rights Legislative Day. It was a good day!

Also in March, Jeff and Jason participated in the Victimization Task Force. This statewide group is planning do something about the big problem of people with disabilities getting assaulted and abused. It needs to stop!

Above: People First of Boone County members at a chapter meeting



Branson

We have plans to hold a spring dance. It will be a fundraiser, and we believe it will be a great success. Our New Member, Fundraiser, and Activities Committees have been working hard to get donations from businesses for prize drawings. A representative and guest speaker gave us good ideas on how to advertise and get the word out. It is an exciting time.

Our sidewalk project is coming along. At first, we weren't sure where to begin. We needed to find which representatives to contact since we are outside the city limits. We received help from a member of the community who works on these kind of projects.

We have two new members who are eager to help on our projects. Our Steering and Legislative Committees put together topic questions to ask our representative when they met on Legislative Day. We are hoping all these activities build the self-esteem of our members and knowledge that they have a voice and should not keep silent.

Independence

This winter and spring have been very positive for the members of People First of Independence. We are happy to report that our President, Joe Wrinkle, has finally recovered from the long ordeal of complications from his heart surgery. It is good to have him back at full strength

Five of our members enjoyed a great vacation as they drove to New Orleans with Special Neighbors' staff. They left on a cruise to Cancun, Mexico, where they spent two days before returning home. It was a great late winter break for them.

The Special Neighbors Apartments, which has provided meeting space for People First of Independence for the past 26 years, has changed its name to Truman Apartments. They have generously agreed to continue to provide meeting space for our chapter.

-continued on page 6

PFMO Chapter Updates, continued

Independence, continued

Our group continues to spend much of our meetings discussing issues concerning people with disabilities and working on a review of the People First Manual. While our members do not always agree on some of the current issues impacting people with disabilities, we have learned and grown from our discussions and we are already beginning to prepare for this year's elections.

Lebanon

The Lebanon chapter held a bake sale in October at Wal-Mart. We made \$125. We also are selling t-shirts, which made \$175. In December, we had a

Below and top right: Pike County chapter members lead a "Feel It" training for parents and children from "Little Explorers." Bottom right: chapter members present a \$500 check from money they raised for a new sensory park in the Bowling Green area.

Christmas dinner and invited the Rolla chapter to join us. We lost one of our chapter members, Thelma Eads, on February 7.

Our Advisor and four members went to the Disability Rights Legislative Day at the Missouri Capitol. We will be having another bake sale on April 30.



PFMO Chapter Updates, continued

North Kansas City

The North Kansas City chapter held its February meeting on the 16th. Scott Tricky and Vonda Powell presented on friendship. We held elections. New officers include Christina Driver, President; Robin Lloyd, Vice President; Randy Todd, Secretary, Danny Shipp, Sergeant-At-Arms.

Pike County

Pike County Chapter currently has 12 members who have been very busy and are looking forward to another exciting year!

We started off the year by doing a "Feel It" training with a "Mom and Me"-based play group called "Little Explorers." We learned how it might feel to be blind through blindfolded activities like finding objects and walking across the room. Everyone had a great time learning!

That same night, People First of Pike County also presented a check for \$500.00 to go towards building a sensory park in the Bowling Green area. People First of Pike County is currently organizing a "Family Feud" game night to raise money for the local YMCA to purchase accessible equipment for citizens who use wheel chairs and would like to access the pool.

We hope to have the money raised and new equipment purchased by May 2016!

St. Charles

The St. Charles chapter has been busy with many different events and activities the past few months. We visited Jefferson City for Legislative day. We were able to meet with numerous representatives and sat in the Missouri House for some time listening to a debate.

We also have been working on and just held our first "People First Peers" group. This event was for juniors and seniors in high school, to have them come meet us, see what we are about, and let them know there is a place for them when they turn 18. Our goal was to make transition more comfortable for them.



Above: Members of the St. Charles chapter meet with Rep. Ann Zerr to discuss the Medicaid asset limit.

We are continuing to work on "Don't Dis my Ability." With this campaign, we are working to get into school districts to speak to the staff and present about focusing on positives (not always the negatives), to see "strengths over weakness."

Tiger Country

We are working on a brochure to hand out about People First and our chapter. We will be meeting at a new date and time on the third Wednesday of each month from 5:30 to 7 pm. We are working on our bylaws and recently welcomed a new member to our group. We are working on fundraising this spring and hope to send two people to the Real Voices Real Choices conference this year.

Make sure your chapter is included in the next issue!

Send an update about what your chapter has been doing by emailing underwooddm@umkc.edu. Articles and pictures are welcome!

Disability Rights Legislative Day and other PFMO Events

What a spring it has been!



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