

Europe for us!

February 2004



Editorial

It is important for self-advocacy organisations to learn from self-advocates and their organisations from other countries.

The network People First Germany has interesting ideas and projects.

That is why I have asked Stefan Göthling to write an article about People First Germany.

I am sure it will inspire you for the work in your country!

Ulla Topi
President of EPSA



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People First Germany

People First is an organization for people with intellectual disability.

People First was founded in 1973 in Canada. In 1974, a first conference was held. There were 500 participants. They met in this conference, because they all thought they had to do something and fight together for their rights and interests.

Since 1994, People First also exists in Germany. In that year some people with learning disabilities begun working for People First.

In December 1997, the Federal Project "We represent ourselves" started. Plans were made for the following 4 years.



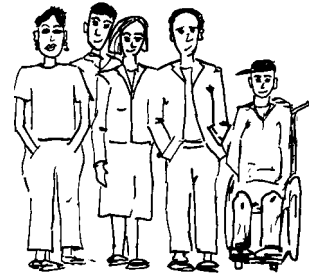
With support
of the European
Community

The project had four different bearers.

This is the logo of the Project:

There are 2 support persons and 4 people with intellectual disability that work in the project.

Those 4 persons worked in workshops for people with intellectual disability before they did this job.



The persons were not appointed by means of written applications. Rather, the support persons have tested these persons for 3 days in order to assess their strengths and their skills.

The support persons did not let themselves be influenced by prejudices coming out from the workshops. For instance, it was said that one person played with teddy bears the whole day or that another person was not capable. But the latter spoke two languages, German and English.

The first challenges for the Project “We represent ourselves” were:

- How do I look more self-confident?
- How do I make a speech?
- How do I work with computers?

The co-workers of the Project wrote some books, for example “The little 1x1 for good understanding” and “The dictionary for easy-to-understand language”.



The Project “We represent ourselves” makes the work of People First more known and thus 21 People First groups have been founded in the whole of Germany.

In 1999, the co-workers and the support persons of the Project noticed that there was more and more work for People First.

One of the co-workers noticed that the work was not really what he wanted to do. For this person, another job was searched. This person was given a job in the field of domestic economy. This job was more fun.

Then 3 other co-workers with learning disabilities were needed, as well as 2 more supporting persons.

During the project all workers set up several conferences in order to make People First even better known.



At the end of 2000, the co-workers discussed how People First could continue after the end of the Project. Different possibilities were discussed.

They considered different possibilities:

- Shall we make a new project, in which different bearers will have a say?
- Shall we make a development association so we can get money out of it?
- Shall we make our own association where our bearers have a say?

The concerned persons sat together and decided: « We want our own thing!» So they looked for support and listened to other people's advices.



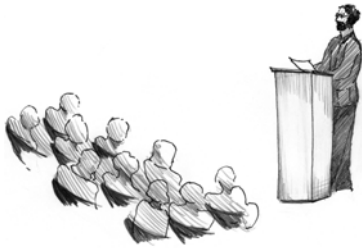
On the 3rd of February 2003, the organisation 'Network People First' was founded. The network's board of directors applied for a new project to the Ministry of Social Affairs

The difference with the former Project was that people with intellectual disability took over the responsibility.

The request was approved for the Period from December 2001 until December 2004. The board appointed 4 concerned persons, among them the employer and 3 support persons.

These co-workers:

- Train the members of our staff
- Give speeches about self-determination and self-advocacy
- Spread publicity reports such as « What is People First »
- Develop a network in Germany



- To get information
- To tell us about news and meetings

Please contact us!

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The network shall support the empowerment of people with intellectual disability under the motto "If they can, I can too. Because we know how, we are experts in our field".



Nowadays, the network People First Germany is fighting against the term 'Menschen mit geistiger Behinderung', which concerned people think is discriminating.

In October 2003 the network is celebrating its second board election under the motto, do anything possible to strengthen People First. People First must become stronger and stronger. "Because we know what we want!"

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