

*New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network*

# **I'm A Person First**



**My Disability comes Last!**

# **Action Kit**

# **I'm A Person First**



**My Disability comes Last!**

*New Jersey Statewide  
Self-Advocacy Network*

*ACTION KIT*

The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project in conjunction with the New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network would like for the local groups to join with us in spreading awareness of **PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE** in everyday language. This statewide respectful language campaign can make a tremendous impact if our local groups can host an event to promote disability awareness. We feel that this campaign can be easily added to the activities that you already have planned for your calendar events. We have included in this activation kit several ideas that your members can do in order to speak out against being referred to as a person and not a disability.

**This kit includes:**

- **Talking Points and key message of the I'm A Person First, My Disability Comes Last! Campaign.**
- **Samples of Thank You cards and bookmarks to copy and hand out**
- **A Message from the NJSSAN Advisory Board**
- **Sample Letter to the Editor**
- **Talking Points for the Press**
- **Event Ideas**

**For more information, please contact The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project at (732) 246-2525 ext. 30**

# I'm A Person First



*IDEAS FROM THE NJSSAN  
ADVISORY BOARD*

## My Disability comes Last!

- We Need to work together and not harm each other
- We Want you to create a presentation
  - Include:
    - Explain WHO you are and what Self-Advocacy is. (self-advocacy is about speaking up for your rights and respect for others)
    - Ice breaker or question to help your audience feel comfortable.
    - Explain WHAT YOU WANT (that words can be hurtful and harmful and can cut like glass.)
    - Explain that people with developmental disabilities aren't second class citizens and we would like to be treated equal.
    - Explain HOW THEY CAN HELP (1. Using People First Language is showing respect to people with disabilities. 2. Recognize that people with disabilities are ordinary people with common goals for a home, a job, and a family. Talk about people in ordinary terms. 3. Please avoid negative words that imply tragedy, such as afflicted with, suffers, victim, prisoner, and unfortunate.)
    - Thank them for listening and offer to be available for any questions.
- Write down all of your groups contacts and send out an information sheet on People First Language.
- Take this message to other groups that you are a part of. Spread the word to everyone.
- Contact public and private schools, colleges, businesses, governmental offices, agencies that you know and ask them if you can present your presentation.
- Take information to law schools, journalism schools, medical schools.
- Hand out People First Language information in your neighborhood, churches, temples, etc.
- Design thank you notes for individuals or groups who use People First Language and send it to them.

# I'm A Person First



## My Disability comes Last!

### *SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR*

Writing letters to the editor of your local paper is a great way to promote our campaign's visibility in your community and spread the word about important issues such as Rosa's Law. Letters to the editor are especially effective in local, community papers. You can send letters by e-mail, fax, or through the mail.

From Self-advocate

DATE

To the Editor:

For too long, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have not received the respect we deserve. There is a long history of discrimination and mistreatment of people with developmental disabilities in the United States and around the world.

While many things have improved in our lives, we still have to deal with being defined by our disability when people refuse to use People First Language and refer to people with developmental disabilities as the r-word. As we go about our everyday lives as average citizens we are constantly reminded of societies discrimination toward not perceived as "Normal" . [OPTION TO INSERT PERSONAL EXAMPLE HERE]. A bill called Rosa's Law has been passed by both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate and replaces the terms —"mental retardation" and —"mentally retarded " with —"intellectual disability" and —"individual with an intellectual disability" in federal laws and programs.

The r-word is used to insult and make fun of people in ways that are hurtful, and it should be as unacceptable as it is for someone to use a slur to describe a person who is African-American, Latino, Asian, gay, or lesbian. This will help to educate people about how the words —"retard" or —"retarded" are used to insult or demean people.

Rosa's Law is a step forward in helping to stop the use of hateful language. There are more than 6 million Americans with intellectual disabilities and the only r-word we want to hear is respect.

NAME

CITY/TOWN

# I'm A Person First



*TALKING POINTS FOR  
BROADCAST (TV/RADIO)*

## My Disability comes Last!

When we adopt new ways of thinking and talking about people with developmental disabilities, we'll not only exert a positive influence on their lives, but on our society as a whole.

The Rosa's Law was just passed by both the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives to eliminate the terms —"mental retardation" and —"mentally retarded" from the federal laws and programs. These are hurtful words and need to be removed from our laws as well as our everyday language.

In introducing the Rosa bill with Sen. Michael Enzi (R-WY), named after 8-year-old Rosa Marcellino of Maryland, Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) said, —"It brings us out of the dark ages and into a world of evolved sensibilities by retiring an archaic term that equates the person with the disability and substituting it with a term that references the type of disability."

Rosa's Law is important to the more than 6 million people with developmental disabilities in this country who are labeled and stigmatized based on use of language in federal programs.

People with developmental disabilities deserve the respect afforded everyone and do not deserve taunts and bullying stemming from the use of the r-word which is used everywhere in our society. Using People First Language emphasizes that person should be referred to as a person first and celebrates their abilities, not limitations.

Rosa's Law is about social justice and human rights. Gone are the days of institutionalization and exclusion. The passing of the Rosa's Law and the use of People First Language is moving us further toward ensuring that people with intellectual disabilities live with respect and dignity in the community.

# I'm A Person



## *OTHER EVENT AND ACTION IDEAS*

### **My Disability comes**

1. Ask your fellow self-advocates to use People First Language!
2. Create banners and signs that inform others about the “I’m a Person First, My disability Comes Last” campaign.
3. Set up a station at your local grocery stores, shopping centers, or community centers where self-advocates can pass out flyers, stickers, buttons, etc. about this issue.
4. Place a butcher paper along the hall of your agency of examples of People First Language.
5. Start a postcard/letter writing campaign to your local and state officials asking them to use People First Language.
6. Email all of your friends and tell them about the People First Language campaign.
7. Contact your local municipal buildings and ask about passing out People First Language information.
8. Contact parade officials to see if your self-advocacy group can march and distribute materials.
9. Create a workshop to present to schools in your area about PeopleFirst language and ask them to take the pledge not to use the r-word.
10. Notify the press. Call the local radio shows and newspapers using the Key Points sample provided.
11. Encourage members to use social networking sites such as “Facebook”, “MySpace”, “Linked In”, “Twitter” to post their thoughts about the People First Language
12. Create a video speaking on People First Language and post on YouTube. Share the link with others.
13. Check out our website to find out the latest Network activities in the “I’m a Person First, My disability Comes Last” campaign.



# I'm A PERSON FIRST



**My Disability comes Last!**

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*The Difference  
between the right word  
and the almost right  
word is the difference  
between lightning and  
the lightning bug*

—Mark Twain

**You Can Help Us By  
Using PeopleFirst  
Language!**



# I'm A PERSON FIRST



**My Disability comes Last!**

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## What is People First Language



It is important to know that more than 43 million Americans with disabilities want to be portrayed realistically and spoken to respectfully. People with disabilities prefer that you focus on their individuality, not their disability, unless of course, it is the topic about which you are writing or speaking. For example, the words ‘disabled people’ define disabled first and people second. The term “people with disabilities” is the preferred usage since it stresses the humanity of individuals.

Do Not Use:	Words with Dignity
1. The Deaf	1. People who are deaf
2. Retarded person	2. Intellectual/developmental disability
3. confined to a wheelchair	3. Uses a wheelchair
4. Blind person	4. Person w/ visual impairment
5. victim of...	5. Person who has experienced
6. Learning Disabled person	6. Person with a learning disability
7. crippled person	7. person who walks with crutches

For more information:  
New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project  
732-246-2525 x 30

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