

## **People First of Washington**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 27, 2020

### **People First of Washington launches outreach initiative to assist people with developmental disabilities in wake of coronavirus**

LAKEWOOD – For people with developmental disabilities, the impacts of coronavirus can be substantial. Job loss and isolation disproportionately affect the population. [People First of Washington](#), a nonprofit led by people with developmental and intellectual disabilities, is reaching out to peers across the state to offer reassurance and foster a sense of community.

During the organization's March 19 board meeting, it became evident that the coronavirus is affecting board members in a variety of ways. Half are no longer able to go to work. One has a mother in the hospital and is unable to see her. Another is experiencing uncontrolled seizures and recovering from two concussions related to falls; she lives alone. Two are adjusting to the shutdown of Special Olympics sporting events.

The board recognized that other people with developmental disabilities would also be experiencing pains. They voted to ensure that all chapter meetings are conducted virtually, and to lead the way to connect with every member by phone.

"It's our responsibility to check up on our members and let them know that the board is here for them," said Past President Tiras Smith, of Spokane.

That includes assisting unemployed members who want to take advantage of financial assistance programs, and helping them stay connected through technology. The organization is partnering with [Wise](#) to help in those areas.

People First of Washington members have taken to the web and social media with online watch parties and a new Facebook group called [Self-Advocates Speaking Freely](#).

"I know that the coronavirus is isolating. But watching movies at home all day or playing games isn't going to be a good answer. Communication with other people is going to be essential," said Anthony Nash, a People First member who lives in Kennewick and is well-entrenched in the advocacy community. He and another member came up with the idea of the watch parties and asked People First of Washington to donate use of its Zoom account.

The new watch parties aren't just attracting people from Washington state. Those as far away as Canada and the UK have also joined in.

“We’ve been talking about advocacy, legislation, things that make us happy. And it just really brings people’s spirits up,” Nash said.

-30-

[People First of Washington](#) is a self-advocacy organization with more than 30 chapters statewide and a membership of more than 1,000 individuals with developmental disabilities. Its 13-member board of directors is composed of members.

CONTACT:

Krista Milhofer, Program Administrator: 253-999-7222, [krista@pfow.org](mailto:krista@pfow.org)