

# EXPLORING OUR VOICES

More than 100 self-advocates and self-advocacy group advisers from around Ohio gathered in Columbus on 30 August 2000. They worked together to explore six questions about voice. John O'Brien facilitated the discussion and Candee Basford noticed that people's answers to the questions made a kind of poetry.

## WHAT MIGHT MAKE YOU FALL SILENT?

IF you talk all you want  
But nothing really happens,  
If you don't have opportunities to learn,  
If people treat you without respect,  
If people act stupid and you can't get away  
And they are in charge ~ you might fall silent.

**IF** you live in a place  
Where people don't take time to listen, and  
If when you try to escape people use fear  
As a way to keep you there,  
If everyone else acts like the staff people  
are the important people you ~ might fall silent.

**IF** people around you talk around you  
And make decisions without you,  
If people pass you by as if you're not there,  
If you live in a world where what you have to do  
Is wait and wait

~You might fall silent

## WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO VOICE?

### PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO VOICE

Might lose skills,

Go numb,

Or shut down.

They might walk away.

If they can't walk away

They have to hold that stuff inside.

### PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO VOICE

Might get depressed.

Get upset and yell.

Get a behavior plan.

Get medication.

Get a reinforcement program.

Get labeled.

### PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO VOICE

Might experience reckless behavior,

A loss of self-worth.

They might feel helpless.

They might stop hoping,

Stop dreaming.

## WHY WOULD SOMEONE TAKE AWAY ANOTHER PERSON'S VOICE?

Someone might take away another person's voice

Because they want control.

Because they think they know better.

They're afraid of what might happen.

People want to talk for us.

It takes too much time to listen.

Someone might take away another person's voice

Because some people think they have a  
self advocacy organization,  
but the organization is in a box.

There are things that happen when you speak out  
and fight with people.

Others might want to put you out.

Someone might take away another person's voice

Because when we're disturbing things  
people get scared  
and people and systems push back.

It's the power of money,

It's job security,

It's the evaluation of people.

Someone might take away another person's voice

Because it's too easy and comfortable to do things  
the way we've always done it.

People think of themselves.

People are well meaning and have good intentions

Even if it's wrong.

## HOW DO PEOPLE'S VOICES GET STRONGER?

*Voices get stronger when we  
Learn to listen  
To one another's stories,  
Not step on them like a carpet.*

*Voices get stronger when we  
Speak to and find others  
Who haven't found  
Their voice yet.*

*Voices get stronger when we  
Find our voice by speaking up and  
Working for change  
In something we care about.*

## WHAT GOOD THINGS HAPPEN WHEN PEOPLE USE THEIR VOICES?

When people use their VOICE

They gain respect and confidence;

Self control and choice.

When people use their VOICE

It can help them live the life they want,

Make more money,

Work where they want to work.

When people use their VOICE

They become participating citizens.

As participating citizens they get results.

More voice means . . . more freedom.

## WHAT PROBLEMS COME ALONG WITH HAVING MORE VOICE?

WITH MORE VOICE

You might invite scrutiny and criticism

Lose your job

Struggle with the system

Get busier.

WITH MORE VOICE

If you see a problem

You might become responsible

To do something about it.

Responsibility means consequences.

WITH MORE VOICE

You might experience

Backlash and resistance

Fear of failure

Loss of security.

WITH MORE VOICE

People won't always agree.

They might attack you

Instead of saying, "I don't agree."

We need more people

WITH MORE VOICE.