# The Power of Words: Understanding Person-First Language

Why It Matters & How to Implement It

# What is Person-First or Person-Centered Language

A way of speaking that puts the individual before their condition or circumstance.

**Examples:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Instead of "disabled person" → "person with a disability" | Instead of "homeless" → "person experiencing homelessness" | Instead of "inmate" → "person in custody" |

# Why is Person-First Language Important

**Respect & Human Dignity**

Acknowledges the person first, not their status or condition.

**Reduces Stigma**

Labels can reinforce negative stereotypes.

**Promotes Inclusivity**

Encourages a shift in how society views and treats individuals.

# Impact of Labels Like "Inmate"

**Dehumanizing Language**: "Inmate" or "offender" defines a person by their incarceration.

**Psychological Effects**: Can contribute to self-stigma and hinder rehabilitation.

**Public Perception**: Reinforces negative stereotypes, making reintegration difficult.

# Preferred Alternatives for the Justice System

Instead of **"inmate"** → Use **"person in custody"**

Instead of **"ex-convict"** → Use **"formerly incarcerated person"**

Instead of **"offender"** → Use **"individual involved with the justice system"**

# Overcoming Challenges & Resistance

**Common Pushback**: "It's just words" or "It doesn't change the reality."

- **Rebuttal**: Language shapes perception and influences treatment of individuals.

**Common Pushback**: "This is what I've always said." or "I can't change.""

- **Rebuttal**: It's okay if you slip or make mistakes, but it's important to acknowledge that and try your best to change your language. It's never too late to learn and grow.

# Public Reporting and Official Settings

- The Commission always uses person-first language in our reports and official settings.

Challenge:

- Try to use person-first language in public and in private.
  - Reflect on your language: Small changes make a big impact.

# Conclusion & Questions