

SDMNY ADVISORY COUNCIL WELCOMES TWO NEW MEMBERS

The SDMNY Advisory Council (AC) has been an important component of our work—and our success— from the beginning. Composed of a wide variety of stakeholders—from self-advocates and family members, to judges, lawyers, healthcare professionals, educators, legislators and providers— AC members have supported our work in a myriad of ways, attending quarterly meetings and giving valuable advice and assistance, with individual members never failing to “step up” when we needed them.



One of the things that has given us the most pleasure—and made us proudest—is the growing number of Decision-Makers who have joined the AC, with all of the enthusiasm and “expertise by experience” that they bring to it. The most recent Decision-Maker is someone you may be familiar with from prior Good News; he was part of the “We the People” video that was shown at the Public Theater Forum in November, and we celebrated his unique signing ceremony in July. Dylan Rivera is 22, a graduate of the Queens College Inclusive Education program, who lives in Queens with his parents and twin brother. In his spare time, he loves playing with his birds Mango (shown here) and Pauli, and drawing, following in the footsteps of his father, a trained visual artist. Dylan says, so eloquently,

“Supported Decision-making is getting the freedom you want so badly and having the help you need for the future.”

The second new AC member is Donny Swanson who brings a different kind of expertise, supporting students with disabilities in transition planning for education, employment and independent living, and transition team leaders from every middle and high school through his job at the Special Education Office of the NYC Department of Education. But Donny’s passion for his work, and for SDM, is also very personal. Diagnosed with a disability at birth, his parents were told to place him in an institution, but instead advocated for him to have an inclusive life, and fought for him to have an inclusive education, with a pre-K program in Staten Island the only place that would take him. He remains a proud Staten-Islander to this day, practicing the advocacy he learned from his parents to advance the rights of people with I/DD. Donny was introduced to us— of course— by another AC member, Irini Bekhit from the Richmond County Surrogates Court. So thanks Irini and



Welcome Dylan and Donny!