

SDMNY HOLDS 13TH FACILITATOR TRAINING

Last week, a little more than 6 years into our project, we held our 13th training for facilitators, remarking on how far we have come. At the beginning, we had an idea and a plan, largely based on work our international colleagues had been doing in countries like Bulgaria, Australia, the Czech Republic and Israel, and about 20 intrepid volunteers who, as facilitators, would begin to demonstrate whether it would—or wouldn't—work. At each subsequent training we were able to build on what we had learned, revising existing materials and adding new ones. Facilitators wanted more “practice” so we added simulations and role plays. We made videos of what might happen (and what could go wrong!) in each of the three phases of our model, working with our friends at Outside Voices Theater Company (Good News [9/17/2021]).

As successive groups of facilitators worked with more than 100 Decision-Makers and their supporters, the facilitation process became more sophisticated, as did our facilitator training. We discovered that what we understood as the kinds of support that a Decision-Maker might choose were also the steps in making decisions that everyone uses. This led to developing and refining the “unpacking” and “mapping” tools that are now such an important part of the facilitation process. We knew how important fostering intrinsic motivation was for Decision-Makers, but now we are beginning to incorporate the same tools for Supporters even as we place greater emphasis on capacity building for them. Our Facilitator Manual, just revised to include information about the new SDMA legislation, has grown to over 120 pages. And, of course, because of Covid, we have had to learn how to do all of this remotely!



This new group of facilitators included our four new salaried Mentors (Good News [9/9/2022]) who will complete 3 facilitations before they begin to co-mentor, and then mentor a future cohort of new facilitators. It also included 8 amazing staff members from AIM Services, one of our partner agencies. As always, we were thrilled and re-invigorated by their energy, their thoughtfulness, and by the multiple perspectives they brought to the 2-day training. They seemed to share our assessment: here are just two of their comments:

"I knew very little about SDM prior to the training. But what I found particularly valuable was that decision-making is not goal-making. The facilitators cannot help the DM with their actual goal, but they can assist the DM in making decisions that will eventually (maybe) lead them to achieving their goals."

"[T]his training was extremely informative and as I start working, either as a practice scenarios [sic] or once I start working with DMs directly... I feel I have really been set up to succeed, especially with having a mentor for the beginning steps as I continue to grow in my new role."

One part of the training that has remained essentially unchanged is SDMNY's commitment to decision-making as a human right, so we were especially pleased with this final comment:

"What I found particularly moving was learning about human rights and understanding that by virtue of being born a human, one has the intrinsic right to have human rights, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or developmental capability. It allowed me to think of my sister and other family members with I/DDs in a different light. So often my family members feel it is their right to make big decisions for my family members with I/DDs. While their hearts are in the right place, they are unintentionally stripping people they love, human-beings, of their right to their autonomy. I began to wonder what some of my family members with I/DDs would decide if they had been given access to supported decision-making."

What this new facilitator said is, at its heart, why we do what we do, giving people with I/DD the tools to enable them to live autonomous, self-determined, inclusive lives of dignity and respect.