

WELCOME OUR NEW SDMNY MENTORS:

(In alphabetical order)

AYLAH, JENNA, KAREN AND STEPHANIE

A while ago we explained a little about what we're doing under the new OPWDD grant, and that we would soon be hiring a first tranche of part time mentors (Good News [8/12/22]). We were thrilled with the quality of applicants, and even more thrilled that each of the extraordinary candidates to whom we made an offer quickly and enthusiastically accepted. They will be starting facilitator training this Friday—since to mentor, you must have successfully facilitated at least 3 Decision-Makers—but before that we asked them for a few sentences about why they are joining SDMNY (and a “fun fact”) to introduce them to our community. Here they are, in alphabetical (first name) order.



Aylah is a recent graduate of the Masters Mental Health Counseling Program at SUNY Oswego. During her clinical internship she founded a bi-monthly therapy group for young adults on the autism spectrum, still running, that functions as a rare safe space for members to socialize and share their feelings. She was first drawn to working with people with ASD because of her younger sister who has ASD, and it has now been over a decade since she took her first job as a skills trainer. A fun fact (besides that we learned her name means “goddess” in Hebrew!) is that she loves to garden. This year she “planted tomatoes, eggplants, onions, garlic, peppers, beans, squash, every type of green you can think of, and of course, flowers.”

Jenna, who has already served as a valued facilitator for SDMNY, has worked for 7 years in a variety of capacities at CUNY Disability Services, including developing CUNY Unlimited, an inclusive higher education program for students with intellectual disabilities. Her interest and involvement with the I/DD community began when she was growing up on Long Island and helping her mother, an inclusive education preschool teacher at the Association for Children with Down Syndrome. If you hop on a Zoom call with Jenna, you are likely to catch a glimpse of her dog Willow, a goldendoodle who is always ready to grab some attention- even virtually! Jenna will be with the SDMNY team 20 hours a week while beginning a year-long project as a Trainee with the LEND program at SUNY Stony Brook.



For over 30 years, Karen has worked to transform disability service systems, fighting against the oppressive practices and policies that harm individuals they purport to serve. In addition to working many years in a variety of settings engaged in direct support work (e.g., low-threshold supportive housing, shelter for those without homes, crisis lines, etc.) she spent the last several years at a NYC nonprofit, Community Access, leading them in the design and delivery of an innovative curriculum to support staff in operationalizing rights-based & equity-driven approaches in their work. She says that she “has been privileged to work alongside and learn from those in movements promoting rights & liberation, including psychiatric survivors/peer support workers, disability justice activists, harm reductionists, transformative justice practitioners and end-of-life doulas.” She is also a lifetime live music lover and as she says “still reels with joy with the memory of when she was asked to escort Buffy Sainte-Marie from her dressing room to the stage.”



Stephanie A (to distinguish her from our beloved Project Coordinator Stephanie P) has worked in social services for roughly 7 years, as, she says, “thanks to the amazing opportunities NYC has given me.” She has been inspired by this work because, she adds, “During this time, I have had the chance to see clients grow and excel, which has touched my heart enormously.” Stephanie also has experience as an educator; she was a high school teacher in her native Honduras and recently completed a year-long teaching fellowship in Spain. She “absolutely” loves to travel, having already been to 15 countries “so far.”