

AN SDMA SIGNING ON THE WAY TO RESTORATION OF RIGHTS

Like many other young adults on the spectrum, Zach was placed under guardianship when he turned 18 because his parents were told that it was the right thing to do. And, like other young adults, with or without disabilities, he has grown and matured a great deal over the past several years. He's 24 now, with many interests and talents, from teaching himself to fix furniture, restoring bikes and mapping bike trails in Orange County where he lives, to designing games, a skill he hopes to make into a career. He's attending Orange County Community College (SUNY Orange), excelling in his English classes, and is clearly someone who can make his own decisions with the support of trusted persons in his life. So, when his mom KimLori learned about SDMNY through Parent to Parent NY and told Zach about us and SDM, the work necessary to restore his rights began in earnest.

As Zach and his supporters progressed through the SDMNY facilitation process, he connected with our partner Disability Rights New York (DRNY) to begin the process of petitioning for termination of his guardianship. After signing his SDMA this Wednesday, he said "I'm glad we're in it...now that we've done this [the SDMA] I have my foot in the door. So far, working with my lawyer has been great...I think it will be a lot easier to have the confidence to make decisions without the legal repercussions. I'll have [the] legal right to make my own decisions."



Zach with his parents and his supporter Brian on the right

Important as the SDMA and restoration of his rights are to Zach and his supporters, the rich conversation that followed his signing ceremony highlighted another important benefit of the facilitation process itself. We often hear of the changed relationships that occur in families when an adult child becomes a Decision-Maker and family members become Supporters. Mom KimLori and dad Ron were especially thoughtful about this transformation:

KimLori described becoming a Supporter as "an incredible experience" that "has helped me to shift in my approach and in my understanding of my role, as well as Zach's role and responsibility in his decision-making process...It's helped me to do a gut check when I catch myself thinking about falling into familiar responsibility routines and pivot to creating space for Zach to own [his decisions]..."

And Ron added "[During]the last 8-12 months working with Zachary...he's grown into such a force... he's a good planner, thinker, very considerate of people... [and now] he's politely finally taking charge. It's freeing for everybody... it's freeing for me. I have to remind myself when it's feeling risky, Zach has the right to make his own mistakes."

Zach himself says that you can learn more from failures than from success. While we wish him few failures and much success, we celebrate the support system he has created to allow him the dignity of risk that is part of everyone's right to make their own decisions and to learn and grow from them.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO ZACH AND HIS WONDERFUL SUPPORTERS
AND THANKS TO FACILITATOR JANINE!**