

A CHAMPION FOR SDM MOVES ON

Fifteen years ago, hardly anyone in the U.S. knew anything about supported decision-making (SDM). As we have reported earlier [Good News 10/21/22] the first national meeting on SDM wasn't held until 2012. While a few academics were writing law review articles about the theory of legal capacity, virtually no one was thinking about how to actually do it, or how to change the law to use SDM to enable people with I/DD to retain their legal and civil rights.



Roger Bearden was the exception. As Director of Disability Rights at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYPLI) he began conversations, and then a working group of advocates to begin discussing how to change New York's guardianship law for people with I/DD, Article 17-A of the Surrogates Court Procedure Act (17-A). In 2013, when he went to head up the Governor's "Olmstead Cabinet" he ensured that the report that group issued contained recommendations about reforming 17-A. And when he came to the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) in 2014, first as General Counsel and, since 2018 as Executive Deputy Commissioner, he actively championed SDM, both as a less restrictive alternative to guardianship, and as an emerging practice by which people with I/DD could make their own decisions with the support of trusted persons in their lives.

From SDMNY's inception in 2016, we have been in conversation with Roger, and have benefitted from his wise counsel and support. He saw what we had accomplished through our 3-phase facilitation process, and was instrumental in OPWDD's embrace of our work, incorporating SDM facilitation in the bill OPWDD drafted and introduced in the legislature in 2021—the bill that became law when Governor Hochul signed it last July. [Good News 7/29/22]



Roger Bearden, Senator John Mannion, SDMNY Project Director Kristin Booth Glen, and Michael Seereiter of New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation

Roger's support of our work was also surely important in the OPWDD grant under which SDMNY is now operating, a grant aimed at creating a state-wide service delivery system for SDM facilitation for everyone who wants it. His vast knowledge and technical expertise helped inform that model, and if we are successful, the disability community will have benefitted immeasurably from his vision.

Roger worked tirelessly to steer OPWDD through the pandemic, and now, with a progressive and committed new Commissioner, Kerri Neifeld, he finally feels that it is possible to spend more time with his family and to "get a life". He left OPWDD at the end of January, and while we don't yet know where he is going, we're sure that his commitment to the self-determination, autonomy and inclusion of people with I/DD will continue to inform his work and benefit our community. So it's not "Goodbye" but rather

CIAO ROGER. AND MANY, MANY THANKS FOR ALL YOU HAVE DONE!