

## ENSURING THE INTEGRITY OF SDMAS

A great deal of work goes into creating an SDMNY-facilitated SDMA, work by the facilitator, the mentor, the supporters and, of course, most of all, by the Decision-Maker. That's because, as we repeat so often, the SDMA is not just a piece of paper, but reflects and memorializes a learned, agreed-upon process for how the Decision-Maker will utilize support from trusted persons in their lives to make their own decisions in the months and years going forward. It was the efficacy and integrity of the facilitation process that persuaded our Legislature to pass, and our Governor to sign the new SDMA law, Mental Hygiene Article 82 (Good News [7/29/22]) and to require legal recognition of decisions made by persons with I/DD using their SDMAs.

Because legislative recognition depends on that integrity, SDMNY is rigorous in verifying, before the SDMA signing occurs, that the Decision-Maker and their supporters have engaged in every step of our 3-phase process, and that the SDMA that results truly and clearly sets forth the Decision-Maker's wishes and the commitments of their supporters. When a facilitator and their mentor submit a draft SDMA for final review and approval, it is possible to look back over notes recorded throughout the entire process and confirm completion of all the steps necessary for the Decision-Maker and supporters to understand the agreement and how to use it.

But that's not all. Ensuring that the SDMNY facilitation process was followed is one thing; ensuring that it authentically reflects the voice of the Decision-Maker, and does so in a way that will be clear to them and their supporters going forward is another, and equally important. Even after everyone else in the process has done their work, there is more to be done by SDMNY in the final review. How to do that work has been the subject of summer-long learning by our mentors because, as our model is scaled up, they will be entrusted with the final review that, in the past, was done by SDMNY senior staff, including former Project Coordinator and SDMNY consultant Matthew "Hezzy" Smith, Esq.



Hezzy

Over the course of the summer Hezzy, now the Director of Advocacy Initiatives at the Harvard Project on Disability, led 3 intensive trainings on the final review process. The goal was for mentors to develop proficiency and expertise in verifying the integrity of the facilitation process and evaluating all aspects of a solid and well-designed Agreement that centers the Decision-Maker's voice, will and preference for receiving support, utilizing an SDMA Review template designed to ensure clarity, consistency, and authenticity. The mentors were enthusiastic participants, and emerged from the training with an even greater appreciation of the benefits of our thoughtful, tested and validated facilitation process.



Mentors Fateema, Aylah, Stephanie, Karen, Susan, Joan Cornachio, and Jennifer Ivery

Here's what two of them had to say:

"My favorite part of reviewing the draft SDMAs was seeing all the thought and care that goes into developing the agreement! You can see the results of a lot of great conversations and strengthening of the Decision-Maker's voice in the process."

"As a new mentor, it has been enlightening to observe firsthand the work it takes to craft and polish a decision maker's SDMA. I look forward to working together with the SDMNY team to ensure that the agreements reflect the wishes of each unique Decision-Maker."

**So, appreciating the work of the mentors, Hezzy, Joan and Senior Mentor Jennifer Ivery to strengthen this vital aspect of the SDMNY process, and recognizing all the work that SDMNY participants put into their SDMAs,**

**WE WISH THEM AND YOU ALL A VERY HAPPY LABOR DAY!**