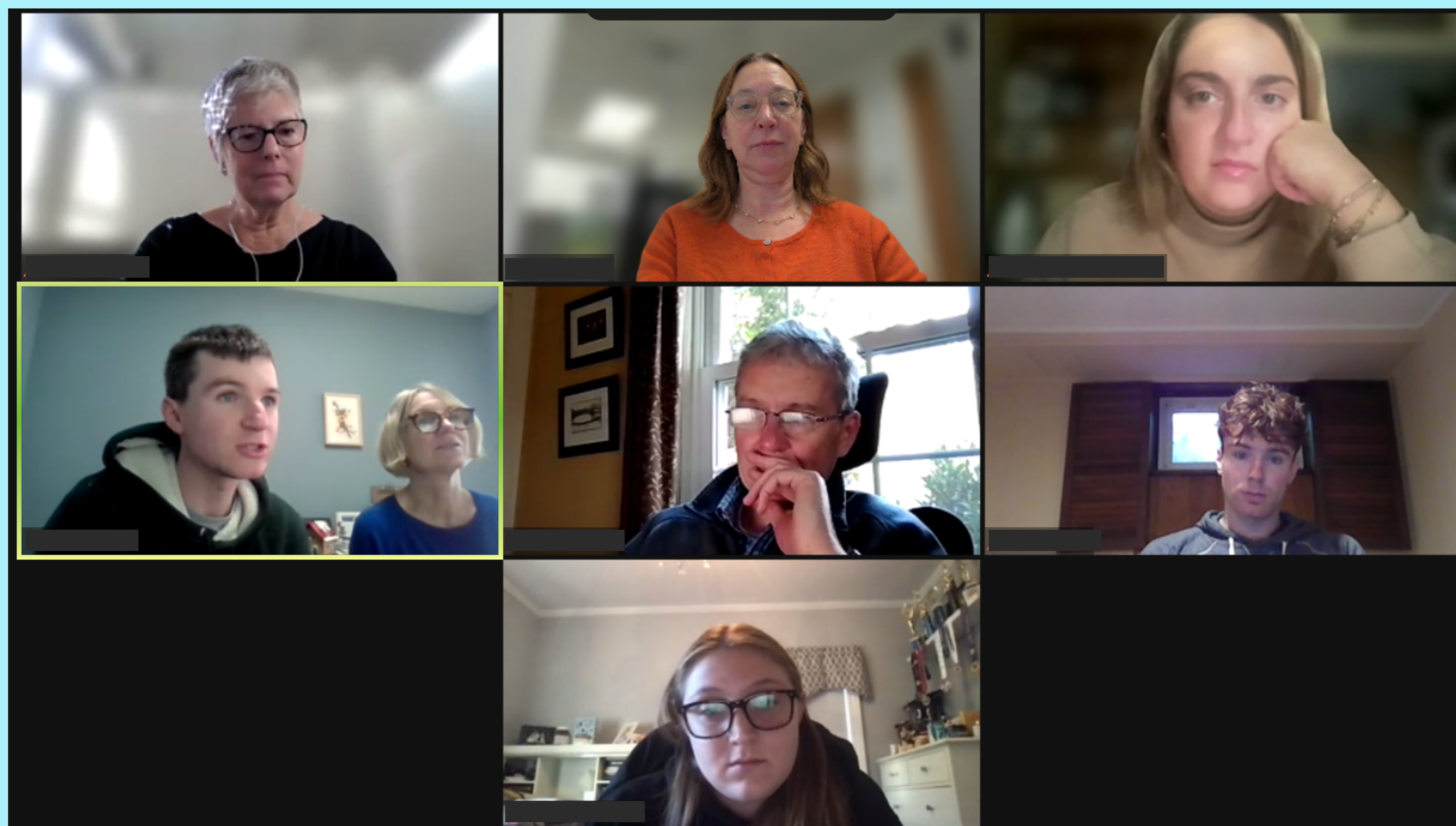


CHANGING THE WORLD, ONE DECISION-MAKER AT A TIME

Because it's almost the new year, and one that has been extraordinarily exciting and productive for SDMNY, we were tempted to share a long list of our many successes. But, at the end of the day (and the year!) SDMNY's real accomplishments are the lives we have changed by making SDM available to people with I/DD and their families. So, instead, we have chosen to celebrate our last SDMA signing of 2023, and reflect on its multiple meanings.

Harry is 21, lives in Port Washington with his parents and two brothers, and currently attends the Inclusive U program at Syracuse University where he volunteers with Syracuse Athletics as a facilities intern. He dreams of working in the sports industry in marketing and promotions after working towards Associates and Bachelors degrees. He enjoyed the SDMNY facilitation process and, at his SDMA signing last week, said that SDM is important "because it allows people with disabilities to be able to make their decisions on their own but with help from their supporters."



Mentor Joan, Facilitator Karen, Supporter Laura, Harry and his mom/Supporter Ann Marie, Supporters Kieran, Rory, and Rebecca

Harry is too modest to tell us, but his mom, and supporter Ann Marie explains:

"It has been wonderful to see Harry become a self-advocate; the best reward as a parent/supporter. He has become a strong disability rights advocate and has started to educate others about rights for people with disabilities. In his classes at Inclusive U he has written about sub-minimum wages laws, lack of funding for post-secondary college programs and what it's like to have a disability. These topics are new to many professors so he is informing and sharing great information. I am so proud of him and I look forward to seeing what more he will accomplish in the future."

The hard work Harry, his family and supporters have put in has immediate and personal rewards; something we hear constantly from participants in SDM facilitation, who describe SDM and the facilitation process as "transformative." But Harry's growth as a self-advocate, and his commitment to disability rights spreads those benefits far wider, to the many lives he may directly or indirectly impact through his advocacy.

Harry's SDMA signing, along with the many others who have, and will be enabled to make their own decisions with support, has an even further reaching impact as they avoid guardianship, and retain and exercise their legal and civil rights free from discrimination, thanks to New York's SDMA law. The bias and prejudice that still exist in the larger society can best be overcome when individuals change how they see those they have perceived as "different," and that's exactly what happens when people with I/DD have their decisions respected. Harry's cousin and supporter Laura got it exactly right when she said "[SDM] gives Harry and other Decision-Makers' autonomy, freedom, and independence which are some of the most valuable traits we have as individuals. It also paves a way for a more inclusivity in society by respecting people with differing abilities."

**Respect, equality and inclusivity are what we wish
for everyone, and for the New Year.
Thanks to Harry, and all the other Decision-Makers,
their families and supporters, present and future.
Together they are changing the world!**