

## CELEBRATING THE RESTORATION OF RIGHTS

Decision-Makers and their families come to us for many reasons, avoiding guardianship, building self-determination, providing a support system that will outlast parents, etc., but most of them do not have court-appointed guardians, so they have all the legal and civil rights that every adult possesses. A much smaller number of Decision-Makers and their families come to us expressly to un-do a guardianship that may not have been appropriate at the time (parents say “we only did it because the school told us we had to”) but that surely is not now, when the alternative of SDM exists. When those Decision-Makers sign up for SDMNY facilitation, successfully complete the process and sign their SDMA, the story is not over, and the celebration continues.

Zach and his wonderful family learned about SDM and met us through a Parent to Parent of NYS webinar and immediately saw SDM facilitation as a potential path to terminating his guardianship. With that goal in mind, he and they worked hard, and, as a result, celebrated his SDMA signing (Good News [10/28/2022]). Zach had already begun working with our partner Disability Rights New York (DRNY), and we just learned that the Surrogate in Orange County ended his guardianship and restored all of his rights in an order signed at the end of January.



*Zach with his parents and his supporter Brian on the right*

It's hard to imagine anything more meaningful and consequential than going from the status of a “ward” who has absolutely no right to decide anything about their lives, and whose wishes third parties can and must ignore with impunity, to a person with the same rights and legal protections as anyone else. Or, as one of our Decision-Makers described it so eloquently, to become “the architect of your own life.”

Speaking of eloquent, here's what Zach himself has to say about SDM and this wonderful accomplishment:

“In today's increasingly complicated world, many vulnerable young adults struggle to adapt to the responsibilities that our society expects them to handle independently. Often, when individuals are unable to meet these demands on their own, the go-to course of action is to resort to a guardianship. But by entering into a guardianship, these individuals hand over many of their rights to their legal guardians, and in the process lose the opportunity to make their own choices entirely. As someone who was in a guardianship, my rights were excessively limited. The rights I lost meant that I was not legally allowed to pursue some of my own interests without involving my guardians, even when we agreed that I was more than ready to explore things on my own. This is why Supported Decision Making is so important, and why I believe it should be strongly considered before entering into a guardianship. By working through a well- defined process and setting up a comprehensive network of supporters, individuals like me can get the support that we need when and how we need it. And because it does not limit or remove my rights, it protects the most precious ability I have - the chance to explore life's challenges, learn how to overcome them, and to grow as a result into the independent person I want to be.”

We are so happy for Zach and his family, and honored to have been part of this transformational process that affirms Zach's human right to make his own decisions, regardless of disability.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO ZACH, HIS FAMILY AND SUPPORTERS,  
AND THANKS TO DRNY!**