

EVEN BETTER THE SECOND TIME AROUND

Although our primary work has been facilitating Decision-Makers to signed SDMA's with their supporters, we have always been committed to advancing the right of everyone to make their own decisions regardless of disability, with or without a formal SDMA. And, as we realized early on, for people with I/DD, that often begins with explaining and demonstrating how we all make decisions, the steps that go into those decisions, and where support may be necessary or desired for each individual in different decision-making areas.

We started several years ago with a 10-week, after-school course on decision-making for transition age youth at the Cooke School, a promising experiment that resulted in a DDPC grant for curriculum development to our Faculty Associate, Special Ed Professor Gina Riley and the Hunter School of Education (Good News 11/4/2022). We had always wanted to expand into post-secondary Inclusive Education, and, partnering with AHRC and its Melissa Riggio Scholars program, launched our initial effort at Hostos Community College in the Bronx last fall (Good News 10/13/2023). That first iteration was, by all accounts (and especially the students' appreciation and affirmation) a success, but with lessons learned, and more lead time to prepare and engage program staff in the theory of SDM and the format of the course, the second iteration, which concluded last week at Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) was an "even more excellent learning experience" for participants.



From left to right: Francisco (mentor), William, Serigne, Joan, Zenia, AJ, Charlotte, Mikayla (mentor), Liam, Andrew (front), Jenna

This exciting initiative has been led by Mentor Jenna Lamm, now also Transition Specialist who previously served in various roles in CUNY Disability Services, and who was able to make all the necessary connections to move the project forward. Her experience reinforces our belief that the learnings in this work are always mutual, while she "taught" the class along with SDMNY Associate Director Joan Cornachio, she notes how working with the students in the class has increased her own understanding about how transition age youth "are thinking about their decisions and what topics resonate the most." Another benefit is that she has been able to bring back her learning experiences with students to the facilitators she is mentoring at SDMNY. The lessons of these first two courses will now be utilized to further refine the curriculum and prepare for a "train the trainer" model this fall, permitting other teachers to implement the course going forward.

The BMCC students are no less encouraged and enthusiastic about what they have learned, and how they will put it to use in their lives. Among their comments about what they learned: "Gather information. Know all your options." "I have learned what consequences mean, how to ask a question, and to gather information." And, of course, "Decisions are important!"

**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE BMCC MELISSA RIGGIO SCHOLARS,
AND THANKS TO THEIR PEER MENTORS, AND JENNA AND JOAN!**