

SUPPORTED DECISION-MAKING AND VALUES

Everyone has values, and brings those values to the decisions they make, whether the subject of the decision itself involves the value, or the person's values influence their process in making the decision (for example, from whom they may seek support). People with I/DD are no different, and a recent SDMA signing reminded us of this important consideration.

Last week Decision-Maker Declan, his family and supporters, and his facilitator Susan all celebrated his SDMA signing at his home in Queens. The celebration was special in a number of ways. Not only was Susan physically present, but the facilitation process itself included in-person meetings (as was our practice before Covid) in addition to the now familiar Zoom sessions. As well, it was Susan's first completed SDMA and a source of real joy and accomplishment for her; as one of our staff mentors, it is a requirement that she successfully complete three facilitations before formally beginning to mentor.



Declan with his family, supporters, and facilitator Susan

Declan is 19 and works at places like Five Guys and Panera. He found the facilitation process easy and manageable, and began using it to make decisions about a new opportunity at one of his jobs. Declan says that SDM is important because "people will listen to me." His brother Will, who is one of his supporters, describes Declan as "really smart and funny" and "definitely hav[ing] his own opinions." About the process, his Mom Christina says:

"Declan is his own person, and it has been a growing experience acting as his supporter rather than his mom. These are 2 distinctive roles, and I am growing into the supporter role, taking a step back and following and respecting his decisions, even though I might not make the same choice."

Mom also describes Declan as having "deeply held beliefs;" those beliefs/values were clearly reflected in the choices he made during the facilitation process. Thinking about decisions he may make going forward, and his hopes for the future, Susan noted how important Declan's church was to him, and how it would continue to factor in his life. Declan spoke of wanting to work at the church and perhaps to become a Brother. He chose his parish priest, Father Mac, as one of his supporters. Significantly, belief is explicitly included in the SDMA itself.

Every SDMA sets out the areas or domains in which the Decision-Maker may seek support in making relevant decisions. Some, like health, finances and living arrangements are common, if not near universal. Some are specific to the individual Decision-Maker because, after all, it is their SDMA and their life. Declan chose, as a separate and specific area, "Spirituality" for decision-making support. In addition to his Mom and his Pop-Pop (maternal grandfather), he chose Father Mac as a supporter for decisions in this area. In accepting the responsibility of being a supporter, Father Mac also confirmed what a strong role Declan plays within their church community.

We often note that an SDMA is more than just a piece of paper; it is a process that the Decision-Maker, with their supporters, will use in making decisions, large and small, throughout their lives. Declan reminds us an SDMA is also a tool to ensure that the decisions they make using their SDMA will truly reflect the values they hold most dear.

CONGRATULATIONS AND THANKS TO DECLAN, HIS SUPPORTERS AND FACILITATOR SUSAN!