

OUR VALUED FACULTY ASSOCIATE GINA RILEY ASSUMES NEW RESPONSIBILITIES AT SDMNY

When SDMNY was just a gleam in the eyes of a few people associated with CUNY and Hunter College, Hunter Ed School Professor Gina Riley was our biggest cheerleader, and she still is, eight years later. Her title is Faculty Associate, because her “day job” is as a full time (and much beloved) faculty member whose specialty is Adolescent Special Education, but she is so much more, providing immeasurably valuable guidance and inspiration even in the limited time she has available.

In a perfect combination of theory and practice, Gina brought us academic expertise in self-determination theory, including especially the importance of intrinsic motivation. In order to *really* learn (as we hope our Decision-Makers will do) it's not enough that you are supposed to, or that your parents or others want you to—that's *extrinsic* motivation. What is critical is that *you* genuinely want to do so, and research teaches ways to promote and maintain the intrinsic motivation so important to success. We have taken Gina's scholarly knowledge and pragmatic experience of its application to heart, and our inclusion of the importance of intrinsic motivation in everything we do is a major part of our extraordinary success to date.



Gina Riley



Gina as facilitator at Decision-Maker Oscar's colorful SDMA signing celebration

Gina is a born, as well as much accomplished teacher, consistently recognized by her peers, including election as the incoming President of the New York State Association of Teacher Educators (NYSATE). In the sessions she has participated in during virtually every Facilitator Training we have held (this September will be our 17) she has inspired and informed the trainees with unmatched enthusiasm and authority. As we have moved into our current implementation grant, with an ever-increasing number of potential facilitators from a variety of sources, it has become important to provide greater standardization to the curriculum, to be more explicit about learning objectives and to utilize a more explicitly pedagogic approach, all areas in which Gina is unquestionably expert. SDMNY Director Naomi Brickel has asked Gina to take greater responsibility for the skills training that enables facilitators to move Decision-Makers to greater autonomy and self-determination, and, as always, she has generously agreed.

But it's not as if she has a lot of extra time! In addition to her full-time faculty responsibilities, Gina is the Director of a groundbreaking DDPC grant to the Hunter School of Education (Good News 11/4/2022) that grew out of her work in, and commitment to, SDM. Now in its second year, the project is developing scenario-based curricula on decision-making for early learners, middle school students and transition age youth in special education, already engaging more than 70 schools and 900 students across the state.



Gina with Sophie



Gina with chicken Henny



Gina with goat Loki

One of our favorite (of many) things about Gina is her love for animals, which she manifests with the same energy and enthusiasm she brings to her students, her colleagues, and the work of SDMNY. Her adult son Ben is a successful editor and music educator (of course!) and her wonderful husband Bill is always supportive, if sometimes a bit in awe of all Gina does. That makes time for animals, including the 8 chickens she keeps in their home in West Nyack, sharing eggs with neighbors and colleagues, helping to care for a local herd of goats, and sharing vigorous activity and relaxation with 4-year old German Shepherd Sophie, who's been with Gina she's had since she was 7 weeks old, and who Gina calls her “almost daughter.”

Gina is a truly amazing educator, friend, colleague, mom and partner. We have been blessed to have the benefit of her energy, enthusiasm, deep knowledge and profound commitment to the values of autonomy and dignity for everyone, regardless of disability. That she will be even more involved in implementing the statewide rollout of SDMNY facilitation is our great good fortune, and that of the community we serve.

THANKS GINA. SDMNY IS SO LUCKY TO HAVE YOU!