

# PERSERVERENCE PAYS: A LEGENDARY ACTIVIST SIGNS HIS SDMA

We first met Gerald at a SANYS conference in 2017 where he was inspiring participants with his passionate advocacy for both disability and LGBTQ rights. A year later he signed up with SDMNY and was assigned his first-of many-facilitators. There was never a question of his commitment to the process, or to this tangible manifestation of his belief that people with disabilities have, as he has said, a right to have their voices heard.



*Gerald at a SANYS conference pre-Covid*

Although from time to time during SDMNY's 6-year pilot, volunteer facilitators had to drop out for health, family or similar reasons, this was relatively rare, and Decision-Makers were usually assigned new facilitators within a matter of months, if not weeks. Unfortunately, Gerald was the exception. He began with Project Coordinator Hezzy but as soon as a volunteer facilitator became available, she was assigned to him; unfortunately, she subsequently had to withdraw, as, again unexpectedly did the next, Gerald's third. Amazingly, through all of this, Gerald persevered, and we reached out to one of our best and most devoted facilitators, Tom, to hopefully finish the work. Although he and Gerald quickly bonded and made great progress, a family health issue required Tom to withdraw as well. We turned to yet another SDMNY stalwart, Karen, who stepped up and stepped in, and, FINALLY, last week, was able to see Gerald to his SDMA signing.



*Gerald with his supporters and facilitator Tom*

The celebration took place at Gerald's ADAPT Community Networks Day Hab in Upper Manhattan, with attendees in person and remotely. We hear that Gerald couldn't stop smiling, not just because he'd completed the (way too long) facilitation journey, but also because of the heartfelt tributes to his amazing activism over the years. One of his supporters, SANYS NYC Regional Coordinator and Policy Advisor Evan Yankey noted all the free work Gerald has done for SANYS, always volunteering to present about self-advocacy. He said

"...I've gotten to see how Gerald matters to other people. Gerald presents to college classes and younger student classes and OPWDD and service provider agencies and care coordinators and self-advocacy groups. He's done probably over a hundred or even over 200 presentations with us over the decade that I've known him and he keeps doing them, [including] a presentation at Brooklyn Law School a couple months ago"

There were many other, well-deserved tributes. But one supporter also spoke about Gerald's commitment to the facilitation process, through all its difficulties, and the changes he had observed, saying

"Every time I hear about you being able to do things like go on vacations or spend money on what you want, or buy nice things for yourself, it makes me feel really happy, cuz I remember the Gerald who couldn't do any of those things and that really has changed."

We are so sorry at how long it took, but also so grateful to Gerald for sticking with us, and grateful also for the opportunity to support an amazing member of our community with tools he can use in his life and to continue his powerful, critical advocacy for civil and human rights.

## CONGRATULATIONS-AND THANKS-TO GERALD, HIS WONDERFUL SUPPORTERS, AND FACILITATORS KAREN AND TOM!