

SDM AND SDMNY “FACILITATE” CHANGE IN A PROVIDER AGENCY PARTNER

We often note that the facilitation process is truly transformative for everyone involved, Decision-Maker, supporters, and even the facilitator. A conversation this week expanded the notion of transformation even further—to an established agency that has long provided services to the I/DD community, but is forging a new, more progressive and person-centered agenda inspired by our work at SDMNY.

Over the past year or so, Director Naomi Brickel has recruited a number of agencies to partner with SDMNY, to send personnel for training as facilitators and to accept assignments for people with I/DD who have signed up for facilitation. Most of these partner agencies came with a history of, and commitment to, promoting self-determination and autonomy for their clients. But for a traditional organization then called AHRC Suffolk, embracing SDM and joining our community provided both the incentive and mission-centering base to begin to change its culture—and even its name!



The team responsible for the SDM initiative at the People's Arc
 Tommie Lynn DeLouise, Doriann Adams, Daniela Monti,
 John McGuigan, Wendy Tigchelaar, Lori LaRocco, Nancy Westgate

Two long term employees, Doriann Adams, Director of Staff Development, and Lori LaRocco, Assistant Director of Staff Development had pushed the agency into more person-centered work over many years, but after a 2019 change in leadership and the arrival of a new Director, John McGuigan, the stage was set for real cultural change. That meant pivoting from reliance on legacy services to embracing and advancing the potential of its clients for greater independence, dignity and respect and inviting others with disabilities to join in their community.

Partnering with SDMNY was natural, not only, as McGuigan says, “because it is a wonderful organization doing wonderful work” but because it fosters “an internal drive to hearing all people’s voices and forging connections” and to “communicating the change to the outside world”. And, did we mention, changing the agency’s name to “People’s Arc”? As its website explains, “This new name reflects our organization’s ongoing commitment to creating a more inclusive, community-driven environment where people of all abilities can thrive.”



Chief Executive Officer John McGuigan
 and a potential Decision-Maker

We’ve already trained five facilitators from the People’s Arc, including, of course, Doriann and Lori, who see this new role as “coming full circle” in what they have always aspired to do. Even as its mission is transforming, the agency is also planning to institutionalize SDM and the principles it embodies in its organizational structure. As McGuigan says, “The field has always talked about independence, but what we realize and practice is that real independence also and always requires interdependence.” That sounds a lot like the fundamental premise of SDM— that we all make, and have the right to make our own decisions, but we all also use supports to do so, regardless of disability!

THANKS TO THE PEOPLE’S ARC FOR EMBRACING SDM AND JOINING OUR SDM COMMUNITY!