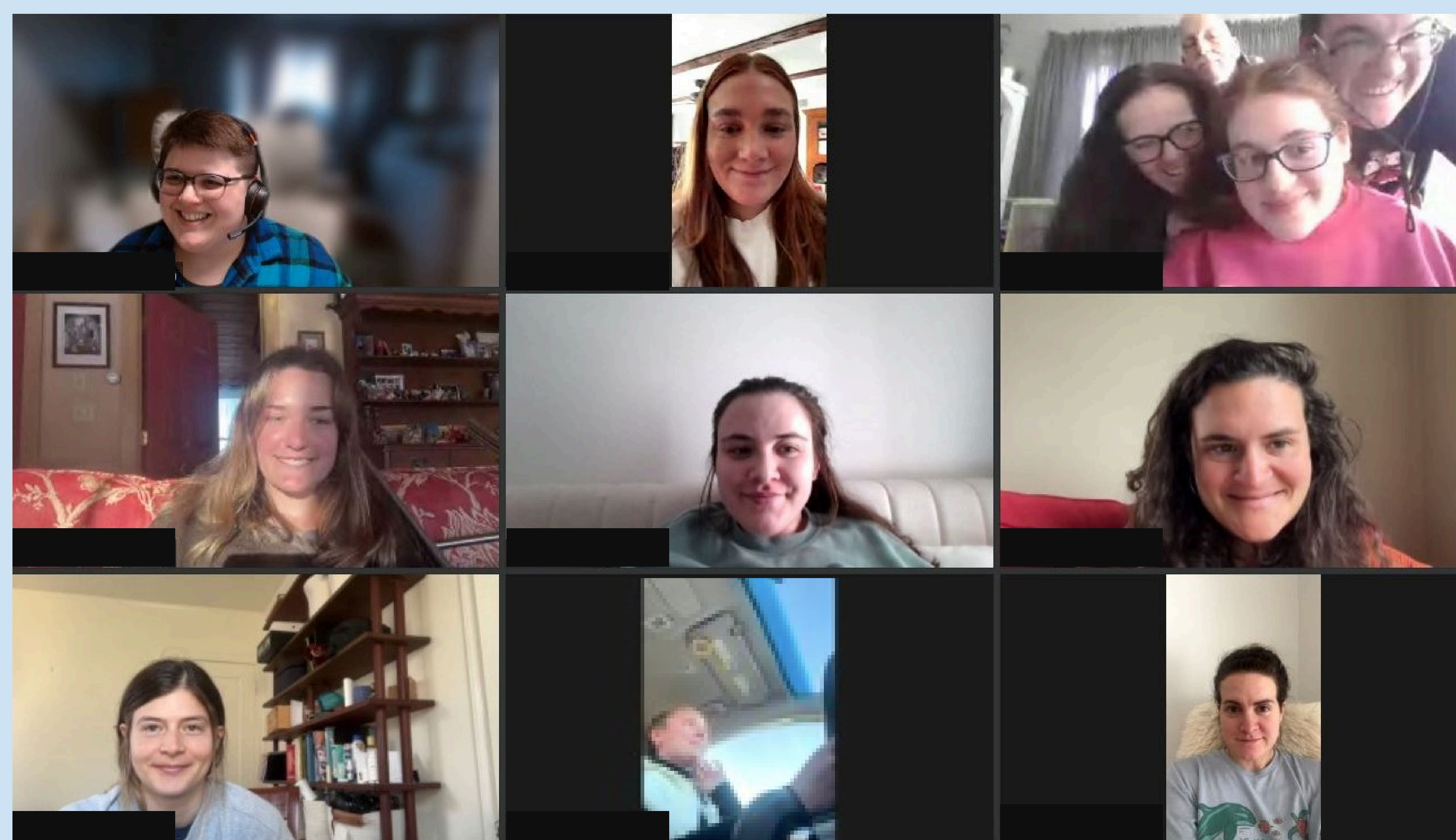


CELEBRATING A DECISION-MAKER, SIBLING-INSPIRED, SDMA SIGNING

A little over a year ago, Good News featured an SDMA signing celebration for Decision-Maker Cooper and his family. In addition to his mom, Cooper had chosen four young male cousins as supporters (Good News 7/21/23). Also pictured was his younger sister Kate (now Katie), who, we have since learned, was listening in during Cooper's facilitation and decided that she wanted to sign up with SDMNy as well. Mom Dodie felt that the work involved in two facilitations at the same time would be just too much, and Katie agreed to wait until Cooper had signed his SDMA before beginning on hers.

Fast forward to January 2025, when Katie celebrated her SDMA signing with her supporters—both parents and eight cousins, all of whom are young women this time! Although the cousins are spread out across the country (California, Tennessee, D.C and Vermont), they have always been close, and love to have fun together. Last year Katie, now 21, took her first trip without her parents to vacation in Florida with the cousins, who affectionately call the group “The B-----s” (you can probably guess!).



Facilitator Marian, Supporter Hayley, mom Dodie, dad Matthew, DM Katie and brother Cooper, Supporters Maeve, Kennedy, Kyle, Isabel, Meghan, Danielle

We were privileged this week to chat with Katie, Cooper and Dodie about their experiences with SDM and SDMNy facilitation, as well as the large, close and loving family that has provided so many opportunities for both these young Decision-Makers. As already noted, Katie and Cooper's supporters are divided along gender lines, but they are all connected to each other. Some are siblings, even including a pair of twins (Sean, Cooper's supporter, and Megan, one of Katie's)! While we have had twin Decision-Makers (Good News 6/7/24) this is definitely a first! The supporters of both genders also talk among themselves, which made the recruitment of Katie's supporters go so smoothly and helped them to understand their roles and responsibilities.



Katie, Dodie and Cooper in our remote kitchen table conversation

As Dodie stressed, Katie and Cooper are very different people, and their experiences in their respective facilitations were also quite different. Cooper's supporters are younger; during the facilitation 3 of them were in college and one was starting at the NYPD, all with wildly conflicting schedules, which made organizing the Phase 2 and 3 meetings quite difficult; Katie's are a bit older, in their 20s and 30s, more settled in their careers and able to agree on meeting times “after work.” Their logistical flexibility and cooperation permitted Katie to sign her SDMA in just a year, while Cooper took considerably longer. Another difference was that, from the beginning, Cooper had a clear idea of what he wanted support with, and who he wanted it from. Katie's SDMA is more generalized and she begins by involving most of her supporters in most decisions while expecting to learn from experience who is most helpful in what areas.

Differences aside, both siblings are entrepreneurial. Cooper still looks forward (though acknowledging that it's a way off) to having a food truck, and is polishing his cooking skills making pasta dinners for the family; Katie has had a small business making and selling salt-based skin scrubs. Now she is moving closer to her dream of working with small children as she begins an internship at a JCC daycare center. Both are, and expect to continue, using their SDMAs and what they have learned about decision-making in multiple ways.

What we love about this story is not only how SDMNy facilitation has advanced both Katie and Cooper's self-determination and legal and human rights. Their experience and that of their family member supporters has also created ripple effects that are likely to bring SDM to many others. Dodie now draws on her personal experience as a mom and supporter to counsel other families about SDM in her role as Regional Coordinator at Parent to Parent New York. And, while we've only mentioned the cousins in this large and loving clan, there is also an aunt who is a judge in Vermont; she has been so impressed with Cooper and Katie's experience that she invited them and Dodie to a meeting to teach her judicial colleagues about SDM and how it can be an alternative to guardianship. We couldn't be prouder.

CONGRATULATIONS KATIE AND HER SUPPORTERS, AND THANKS TO HER WHOLE FAMILY AND FACILITATOR MARIAN!