

ANOTHER STEP FORWARD: ENLARGING OUR MENTOR TEAM

A major learning from our initial 6-year pilot project was the critical importance of mentors in ensuring the consistency, quality and accountability of SDMNY facilitation. Mentors meet with the facilitators to whom they are assigned after every facilitation session, and offer assistance and problem-solving based on their own extensive experience. Every mentor has been a successful facilitator, and is chosen for their demonstrated skills, motivation, and commitment to the core values of SDM.

Originally, all our mentors, like our facilitators, were volunteers, but this has become impractical and untenable with passage of our groundbreaking SDMA law, and the need for a statewide delivery system for SDM facilitation. The OPWDD implementation grant under which we are currently operating has allowed us to design and pilot a scaled-up model premised on a centralized core of paid mentors. Centralizing training, supervision and assignment ensures that, whoever and wherever the trained facilitator may be, every Decision-Maker will receive the same thorough, high quality, and validated facilitation process that the legislature and OPWDD have recognized and endorsed.

Over the past two and a half years we've hired and trained 6 extraordinary mentors who brought a variety of backgrounds and experiences (Good News 9/9/22 and 3/3/23). They began by successfully facilitating several Decision-Makers and progressed to co-mentoring with already experienced mentors, and finally to their own caseloads. Core to our belief in learning from experience, they share best practices at weekly "Mentor Rounds" and participate in monthly Community of Practice meetings with our ever-growing cadre of facilitators.

Now, as we move from a small pilot to a statewide project, we need to substantially increase the number of mentors necessary to make SDM facilitation available to everyone who wants it. We've begun the first round of that expansion by recruiting among our current facilitators, selecting eight individuals for the high quality of their work with Decision-Makers and their supporters, their commitment to the human and legal rights of people with disabilities, and their willingness to take on new challenges. Three are independent brokers, two are lawyers, and three come from provider agencies.



New Mentors

Top from left to right: Lace, Susan, Lori, Marie

Bottom from left to right: Shailene, Joanne, Tonia

(not pictured, Michelle)

We recently held our first "New Mentor Training", led by SDMNY Faculty Associate, Professor Gina Riley, and joined by our existing team, who were excited to share ideas and best practices. Current Mentor Karen says:

"I am excited to see some of the thoughtful, skilled facilitators I've been working with now becoming Mentors! I know they will be as diligent and caring to the facilitators they support as they have been with the Decision-Makers they've been working with. I'm looking forward to working alongside them as part of our growing SDM Mentor community."

New Mentor Joanne commented:

"It always amazes me how supportive, dedicated, and genuine everyone in the SDMNY Community is! The training was enjoyable, engaging, and provided the right balance of opportunity to learn, self-reflect, and collaborate with others. Watching individuals feel more empowered through this process as a Facilitator has been so fulfilling and I am honored to become a Mentor to help others feel the same."

We look forward to learning from this first "expansion" and Mentor Training. As we continue to add new mentors over the remaining period of our grant, we are confident that there will be an excellent and experienced core to carry on our work as SDM facilitation goes state-wide!