

# A HAPPY SDMA SIGNING AND A FACILITATOR’S TRUTH

Jalen is 21, lives with his family in Ossining, attends the College Steps transition program at Rockland Community College, volunteers with the food bank there, and loves basketball. He plays –almost every day– and although LeBron James is his favorite player, he was thrilled to actually meet retired Knicks players Alan Houston and Nate Robinson at the Westchester County Center (for you non-fans, that’s where the Knicks G League [minor league] team plays.) He’s also thoughtful, disciplined, and continually learning more about himself, recognizing his challenges and working hard to meet them.

SDMNY was a perfect match. Jalen’s mom Elaine worked as a self-direction broker at the Westchester Institute for Human Development (WIHD) where his facilitator, Janine is the Manager, Decision Making and Benefits Navigation Solutions of the Community Support Network Team. Elaine had always been “uncomfortable with guardianship” because she: “wants Jalen to have control over his decisions,” so when she attended an information session on SDM at WIHD, the rest was history. Jalen celebrated his SDMA signing earlier this month with his supporters: mom and dad and two great comhab workers.



Jalen at his graduation from Ossining High School

Jalen has big plans for the future, hoping to start his own business making and selling clothing. He even has his brand name picked out: Motion Academy! Jalen wants his business to reflect his love of sport and appreciates his SDMNY facilitation experience saying he “realizes he is getting older now and is not a kid anymore.” He “wants to work and be independent... [and he] wants to be in charge of his own choices.”



Facilitator Janine

We’re proud and happy for Jalen and his “wonderfully supportive” family, but we also want to give a shout out to Janine, who has been facilitating for SDMNY since 2019. She’s been a great advocate for SDM and has done numerous presentations as part of her job at WIHD, and whenever and wherever she’s asked. She really “gets SDM” because she’s also the mom of a neurotypical 18-year-old son, and a neurodivergent daughter in her junior year of college, who is soon graduating (a semester early!) and who uses her considerable musical talents singing in the college’s *a cappella* choir.

In talking with us about the five facilitations she’s now successfully completed, Janine described all of her Decision-Makers as “young men on the autism spectrum,” but insists that “every one of them was different.” This reminds us of the now oft-quoted statement that “if you’ve met a person with autism, you’ve met a person with autism” and why we have never been concerned with (or even asked about) a person’s diagnosis. SDMNY facilitators meet prospective Decision-Makers where they are, recognize them as unique individuals with their own strengths and challenges, and work with them to identify the supports *they* need, and the trusted people in their lives who can provide those supports.

It was both useful and affirming to have Janine remind us of this basic truth. And when asked what had drawn her to SDM and SDMNY she said something else that perfectly capture what we do, and why we do it: “Everyone has the right to figure out how to live their best lives.” We couldn’t have said it better!

**CONGRATULATIONS TO JALEN AND HIS SUPPORTERS,  
AND THANKS TO FACILITATOR JANINE!**