

A HAPPY SDMA SIGNING AND THE DIGNITY OF RISK

Every SDMA signing is a celebration and, at the same time unique in its own way. We're also always surprised and gratified at how the participants may illuminate a core SDMNY principle, and Decision-Maker Jake's recent signing was a perfect example. (We were also delighted that Jake's Aunt—and supporter—Cindi made the connection between SDMNY's home at Hunter, and the fact that Jake's paternal grandmother went to Hunter *and* the signing took place on her birthday!)



Top from left to right: Facilitator Michelle, Aunt Cindi
Bottom from left to right: Uncle John, Uncle Tom, Jake and his mom Luci

Jake is 21, lives with his mom in Manhattan, and attends the Winston School. He's described as "bubbly", "outgoing" and definitely "not shy", "full of character" and "funny." He likes gaming and enjoys going out with his friends. According to Facilitator Michelle, he knows what he wants, and what he doesn't, and is very good at advocating for himself. While this is an important skill for self-determination, it can also sometimes be difficult for a parent who is, understandably, committed to protecting their child. This is where the dignity of risk, an important component in SDMNY facilitation, comes in.

The term "dignity of risk" was coined by Robert Perske in a prescient 1972 article ([click here](#) for a brief excerpt) and asserts that every individual has the right to make choices and take risks, even if those choices might lead to failure. This principle recognizes risk-taking as an essential part of human growth and development, regardless of a person's abilities or circumstances and has been proven to enhance a person's overall well-being while having a positive impact on their physical, emotional and psychological health. The focus on dignity is also critical to the human right of legal capacity which guides all of our work at SDMNY. We recognize and affirm a person's dignity by respecting their inherent capabilities and value, and supporting them to live the life they choose.

In the SDMNY facilitation process, supporters are educated about dignity of risk and encouraged to adopt it as a principle in the new relationship they are creating with the Decision-Maker. At his signing ceremony, Jake's mom Luci called out Facilitator Michelle for the "amazing" way she had presented the concept. She said:

"One of the most powerful things I've learned from [the facilitation] was "The Dignity of Risk", which at first didn't make sense and then it did! Because there are certain times when Jake is saying, I'm going to go do X, Y, and Z, and I'm thinking oh-oh-oh, and then I remember, wait, this is Jake and this is his life, and it's his life to make decisions about. For example, sometimes when it's dark at night, he says he's going to go over and sit by the river, and I think he really shouldn't do that, but then I think about the Dignity of Risk. He knows what he's doing, and there may be some risk, but I've got to give him that and honor that. So that was really important for me, and a big part of what SDM was about for me as a parent, was buying into that. And I think I have and am I also still trying very hard!"

We are honored by, and grateful for the opportunity to share Luci's words and how very real she makes the work of actually living with, and honoring the "Dignity of Risk."

CONGRATULATIONS TO JAKE AND HIS SUPPORTERS, AND THANKS TO MOM LUCI AND FACILITATOR MICHELLE!