

CELEBRATING A FAMILY SDMA SIGNING AND REAFFIRMING AN IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE

Because good news about SDM has been piling up, we're a little behind in reporting what is always our best news, SDMA signings, but we couldn't let the celebration of Decision-Maker George's signing pass without notice. A few weeks ago, he, his mom Camille, and brother Christopher gathered in their Brooklyn home for the culmination of a year of hard work and resulting SDMA, with facilitator Laken and mentor Karen attending remotely. (George is 30 and loves music and singing. He's especially fond of "oldies" from the 80s, which he would often sing during his facilitation sessions. He also enjoys playing video games, a fact that subsequently became useful in the facilitation process.) He asked that his picture not be used here, so of course we honor his decision, although we understand that he is a very handsome young man!

This was Laken's first assignment. When she first met George, she struggled with finding ways to connect with and communicate with him since they were meeting over Zoom and George was quiet – a young man of few words! She wasn't sure she could find ways to really hear his voice and ensure the facilitation would be meaningful. And here's where that important principle came into play.

Laken and her mentor Karen talked through her concerns, and then brought in our uber-mentor Joan. Joan met with George and his mom and returned to reassure Laken, and encourage her and Karen to develop strategies drawn from one of the fundamental principles of SDMNY facilitation,



Facilitator Laken

"Don't ask what a person can't do, ask what it would take for them to do it!"

Figuring out "what it would take" soon involved Camille, who was able to provide Laken with many concrete instances in which she had provided support to George on decisions which he then made for himself, using the support she had given. An important part of Phase 1 of SDMNY facilitation is "unpacking" decisions the Decision-Maker has previously made to demonstrate the seven steps that go into the decision-making process. The examples Camille provided were invaluable in starting that process.

Laken also proved amazingly creative in creating learning and practice opportunities for George. Among the video games he enjoys is Super Mario, and it turned out that Laken had also played the game on Nintendo. They began to play it together, with Laken helping George unpack the decisions made in the course of the game. She created Word docs with colorful pictures to assist him in choosing the areas in which he wanted support. When Laken expressed concern that George had only one supporter – his mom – Camille described how Christopher had often helped George obtain and understand information about community services, including a camp he was considering attending. After further exploration, George added Christopher as a supporter in that area. Karen continued to strategize with Laken and reports on how many examples of unpacking and mapping (considering the steps in making future decisions) Laken and George went through in each area, and how valuable Camille's contributions were; she also pointed to Camille's efforts to ensure stability through engaging George's com hab worker in supporting his decisions.

By the end of the process and his SDMA signing, George had clearly identified and understood the areas in which he wanted support, the kinds of support he wanted in each area, and from which of his supporters he wanted to receive it. He was enthusiastic about the process and said he especially liked learning decision-making skills. Christopher relishes his new, more official role as a supporter. Camille, who was initially nervous, as well as concerned about a future when she might not be there for George, was both relieved and justifiably proud.

George's SDMA is not only a testament to his own hard work, but to the efforts of a committed and loving family. His ability to go forward in his life, making his own decisions with the support he needs and wants, is living proof of, and reaffirms the need to put aside negative assumptions and to believe in everyone's individual capabilities and promise. Most important, it reaffirms our commitment to doing the work of "what it takes" to support people with I/DD in the exercise of their human right to make their own decisions and have them legally recognized.

CONGRATULATIONS TO GEORGE AND HIS FAMILY AND THANKS TO FACILITATOR LAKEN!