

A DEAF SDMA SIGNING WHERE LEARNING WENT BOTH WAYS

We hope that Decision-Makers and their supporters learn from our facilitation process, but we are always excited to learn from them, as so often happens. Decision-Maker Faith's recent signing, a day after her 18th birthday, was a perfect example.

Faith lives in Brooklyn with her mom Rosalyn; she recently graduated from high school, receiving her diploma through homeschooling, with mathematics her favorite subject. She loves fashion “from nails to makeup, clothing, shoes, skincare...” collects handbags and eyewear, and describes herself as “that GIRL!” She is now enrolled in career and continuing vocational education to get a cosmetologist management degree and license. Her future plans are “to travel with others, meet great people and build connections, go to college, get married, and form a loving family.”

But also, and importantly, Faith is Deaf, and she and her (hearing) mom are proud and strong Deaf advocates. Among the influencers and online personalities she admires, Faith included Faze Ewok, a Deaf online gamer, and Bianca Rosemarie, a Deaf model with vitiligo; she named “The Miracle Worker” as her favorite film. Faith shared that she uses all her tech services from Apple because the company “supports Deaf people.” She hopes to use her cosmetologist license to open a salon for the Deaf, employing Deaf people with I/DD.



Faith with her high school diploma

An SDMA was important to Faith as one step in meeting her goals to live a full, productive, rewarding, and happy life, and we were thrilled with the opportunity to assist her. In the course of her facilitation, however, she and Rosalyn also assisted us in learning a great deal about the Deaf community, especially the services they may need to fully exercise their rights, including the right of legal capacity.

We were familiar with ASL (American Sign Language) interpretation, so Faith began her work with facilitator Tom utilizing an ASL interpreter. Tom, who is an especially talented and experienced facilitator, reported that he was not sure that Faith was fully participating in their meetings; Rosalyn, who normally would not be included in Phase 1, was often necessary to ensure that Faith was “getting it.” In consultation with Tom and mentor Karen, Faith and Rosalyn suggested the additional support of a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) to make Tom’s spoken language more nuanced and comprehensible to Faith and, likewise, to better communicate her words and meaning to Tom.

We didn’t know anything about CDIs but were willing to learn, and to include the unique and (as we discovered) invaluable service they provide. The resulting facilitation, which proved a great success, involved the ASL interpreter, a licensed CDI provided by a video remote interpreting services agency, Tom, Faith, and (in Phases 2 and 3) supporter Rosalyn. Here’s a little of what we learned about CDIs:

Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDIs), all of whom are themselves Deaf, are certified by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID, rid.org), the national professional organization of sign language interpreters. In addition to general interpreter training, CDIs may also have specialized training and/or experience in use of gesture, mime, props, drawings, and other tools to enhance communication. They have extensive knowledge and understanding of deafness, the Deaf community, and/or Deaf culture, which, combined with excellent communication skills, can bring added expertise into both routine and uniquely difficult interpreting situations, including educational and legal situations. In the legal arena, courts around the country increasingly utilize CDIs, including having them as full-time employees. ([Click here](#) to watch a CDI court interpreter explain what she does)

The National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes (NDC) explains that, in educational situations,

it is often appropriate to use a DI to provide full and appropriate access. When considering transition planning, remember that the individualized education program is a legal process and thus may benefit from a DI when appropriate. Other high-stakes situations in educational settings include certification tests and interactions with medical or social services [and situations involving legal consequences].

SDMNY facilitation would seem to fit clearly into the category of an educational setting with legal consequences where “full and appropriate access” to language is most critical; as we learned from Faith, the use of a CDI was critical to the success of her facilitation process. SDMNY’s work is directly derived from the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), and Faith’s story reminds us that people with all kinds of disabilities not only have rights, but also that government has an obligation “to provide them with the supports necessary to exercise [those] rights.” For people with I/DD, SDM facilitation may be the support necessary to exercise their human right of legal capacity; for Deaf people with I/DD, it will also include interpretation “to provide full and appropriate access.” We are grateful to Faith and Rosalyn for this important lesson, and to Karen and Tom for incorporating it into our practice.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO DECISION-MAKER FAITH AND
SUPPORTER ROSALYN, OUR APPRECIATION FOR
THEIR ADVOCACY, AND THANKS TO FACILITATOR
TOM AND MENTOR KAREN!**