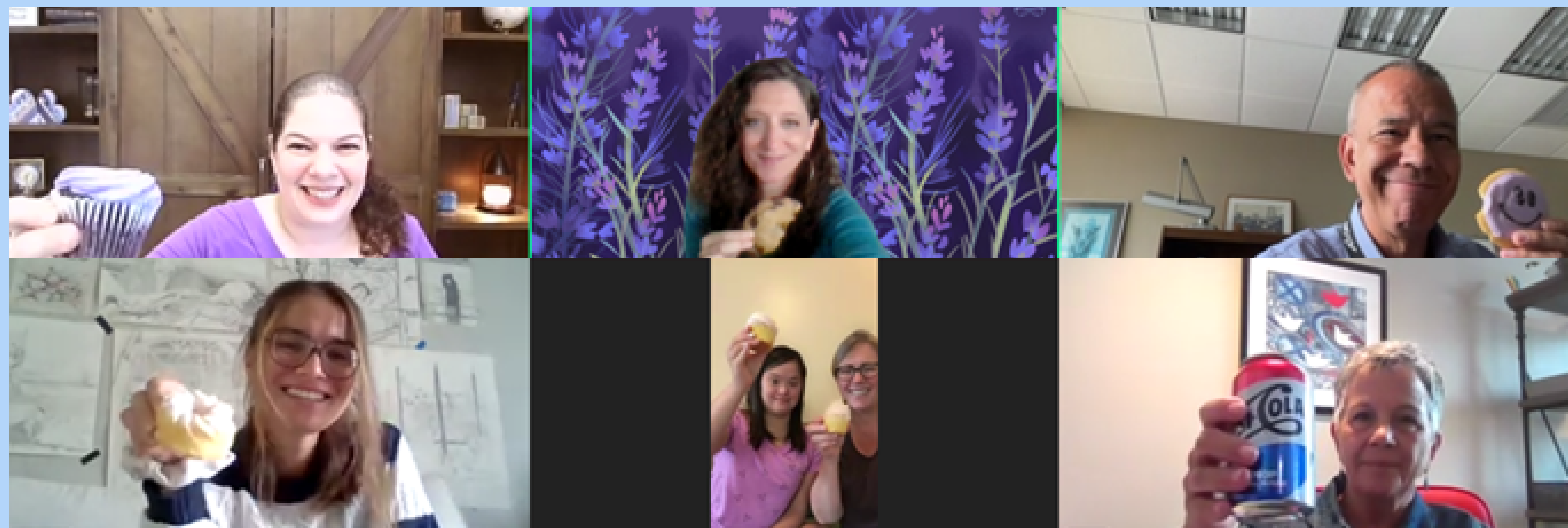


AN SDMA SIGNING FOR PROTECTION, AND A LESSON IN CHOOSING SUPPORTERS

Every SDMA signing is its own celebration, has its own story, and often teaches us a useful lesson. When Decision-Maker Karis celebrated her signing this week, she did all three.

First, a little about Karis, whose facilitator Joanne described as a “unicorn” because she is so exceptionally sweet, determined, and tenacious. She’s 22 and lives in Buffalo, where she has recently moved into her own apartment, conveniently located across the hall from that of her mom, Karol Lynn, and stepdad, Ernest. She and her older brother Michael, an artist (also described as very sweet), love cooking together, and Joanne used their culinary decisions in the mapping exercises that go into learning how decisions are made. Karis is also a serious Swiftie!

This latter fact proved important in the signing celebration that she carefully planned with a lot of excitement; it opened with Taylor Swift’s song “Welcome to New York” (more about that connection in a minute). She also asked everyone to wear her favorite colors, blue and purple, and to bring (remotely for some) a sweet treat to toast her with; the screenshot below demonstrates how everyone happily followed her directions.



Top left to right: Facilitator Joanne, Mentor Karen, Ernest
Bottom left to right: Michael, Karis and Karol, Cyd

The welcoming song segues into the story of how Karis sees (and decided to make) her SDMA as a defense of her right to autonomy. She grew up in Ohio, in Lucas County, which is at the opposite end of Lake Erie from Buffalo. After her parents divorced, her father brought applications in the court to gain more control over her life, efforts she and her mom strongly resisted. Although the judge ultimately ruled in their favor, finding that Karis was a capable young woman, there was still a potential threat of a guardianship proceeding in a different court. Eventually, Karis, Karol Lynn, and her new husband Ernest left the state and

moved to Buffalo, which Karis experienced as “welcoming them to New York.” Once relocated, they learned about SDM and SDMNY and determined that an SDMA would provide the best defense against/protection from any possibility that her father would pursue guardianship in New York. During the successful facilitation process, Karis was clear and vocal about her determination and decision to remain free from her biological father’s control; she chose to include in an explicit statement that she did not want support of any kind or in any area from him in her SDMA.

We know how important the choice of supporters is to the success of a facilitation and the SDMA and how it often takes real thoughtfulness and work to move past the names a Decision-Maker may suggest at the beginning of the process. There was, of course, no issue about Karis’s choice of Karol Lynn, Ernest, and Michael, all of whom were described as “really special” in their commitment to her self-determination. Initially though, and understandably, Karis also proposed her social worker, Brittany. As Joanne explained that supporters are not only trusted individuals, but also that they are expected to be around for a significant period of time, the difference between a trusted resource (the valuable services she was receiving from the provider agency where Brittany worked) and a long-term supporter became clear, and Karis chose Cyd, a longtime family friend and therapist, instead. But recognizing the importance of the resource of good support she was receiving from the agency, Karis’s SDMA provided that, as a supporter in the areas of Services and Community Access, Karol Lynn would “collaborate with [her] service providers as requested.” The distinction between desired resources and individuals who will provide support in decision-making can be an important one, and the solution that Karis and Joanne (with assistance from mentor Karen) came to provides a useful model and lesson for facilitators going forward.

Facilitator Joanne summed up the process this way:

“Karis has grown so much since we began the facilitation process. She is much more confident and comfortable with herself and her decision-making abilities. I am also proud of all her supporters as they have all kept the focus on Karis and have seamlessly stepped into the role of supporting her and her choices.”

And we all learned a lot from it!

**CONGRATULATIONS TO KARIS AND HER SUPPORTERS
AND THANKS TO FACILITATOR JOANNE!**