

AT LAST, CONTRACT APPROVED! A WEEK OF RELIEF AND GRATITUDE

As we've explained before, SDMNY was always meant to be a pilot project—one that would figure out what supports were necessary for people with I/DD to make their own decisions, and how to deliver those supports; then to pass legislation to ensure SDM could be a less restrictive alternative to avoid guardianship, and that third parties could no longer refuse to accept decisions made by people with I/DD because of their perceived "lack of capacity." We were not, and didn't aspire to be, a provider agency, and the implementation grant we received from OPWDD was intended to allow us to develop a "turn-key" model for providing statewide facilitation to another entity better suited to that much larger task.

We are incredibly proud that we have fulfilled our promises and achieved our dreams of advancing the human right of legal capacity for people with I/DD in New York. We hope our model will be adopted elsewhere. We were ready to begin the necessary transition to the successful applicant for a statewide contract in June, when we understood the announcement would be made. Unfortunately, that was not to be the case, and the process of OPWDD approval and the multiple other steps necessary to execute the new contract had not happened by August 31, when our grant, and thus our funding, ran out. We had more than two dozen Decision-Makers in the facilitation process, and no way to pay the facilitators, the mentors who are critical to the integrity and success of the facilitation, or the core team that makes it all work.



Two Decision-Makers who have signed their SDMAs during our "Bridge" period

We couldn't just stop; we owed it to those Decision-Makers and their families, and with enormous effort and the generosity of many, we were able to continue the work, with 24 Decision-Makers signing (or, at this moment, about to sign) their SDMAs between September 1 and December 31. Individual facilitators and the agencies who provided facilitators agreed to continue without pay. The Taft Foundation, which had supported us during our first "bridge year" (the extra year after our initial DDPC grant expired, necessitated by the COVID crisis), and AIMS (spoiler alert: the successful applicant!) provided funds for a skeleton staff at SDMNY to do what had to be done. And on Monday, the contract was finally approved and returned to AIM Services (AIMS), a provider agency with whom we have worked for more than five years, and which is uniquely positioned to continue this amazing journey. To say we are relieved is an understatement. We made it!

SDMNY Director Naomi Brickel says,

"The statewide Supported Decision-Making system developed by SDMNY has set a high standard and gained international recognition as one of the most innovative models in the world. As AIM Services takes on the delivery of this vital service, we look forward to offering our support to build on this strong foundation. Together, we can ensure that New York remains at the forefront of advancing rights and self-determination for people with disabilities."

We are full of hope for the future of SDM and SDMA facilitation, and we are also incredibly grateful for those who made what might have been an impossible transition into a seamless one for our Decision-Makers and their families. So thanks to them all:

Funders: The Taft Foundation; AIM Services;

Agencies: ACMENY; Adapt; East End Disability Associates; Lifeplan CCO; New Hope; Peoples' ARC of Suffolk; and Westchester Institute for Human Development; and

Individual Facilitators: Chaunikah Atkins; Clara Liriano; and Rosemund Metu.

And, of course, the Decision-Makers and their families and loved ones who have placed their trust in us throughout.

What a wonderful holiday gift! Thank you all!