9 FACTS ABOUT SUPPORTED DECISION MAKING

The right to make your own choices in life often excludes people with disabilities. Supported Decision-Making offers a way to gain more freedom and live a self-determined life. Here are nine facts that show how it works and why it makes such a big difference in people's lives.

1. WHAT'S SUPPORTED DECISION MAKING?

Supported Decision Making lets people with disabilities make their own life choices with help from people they trust, like friends, family, or advocates. Instead of handing legal authority to a guardian, the person stays in control of their own decisions.

(Source: National Resource Center for Supported Decision-Making, supporteddecisionmaking.org)

2. AN ALTERNATIVE TO GUARDIANSHIP

Supported Decision Making is a less restrictive alternative to full guardianship or conservatorship. That means a person keeps their legal rights and their autonomy, rather than giving them to someone else.

(Source: American Bar Association Commission on Disability Rights, 2015)

3. WHO IT'S FOR

Supported Decision Making can help people with a wide range of disabilities, including intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), acquired brain injuries, mental health conditions, and age-related cognitive decline.

(Source: ACLU, "Supported Decision-Making: A Viable Alternative to Guardianship," 2018)

4. WHAT THE SUPPORTERS DO

Supporters help the person with disabilities understand information, communicate their decisions, and access services. They don't make decisions, but help the person make the best decisions for themselves.

(Source: National Council on Disability, "Beyond Guardianship," 2018)

5. TWO CHOICES: FORMAL OR INFORMAL

Supported Decision Making can be informal through a personal network of trusted friends and family. Or it can be formal, with a written agreement that's legally recognized. Formal agreements look different in each state.

(Source: Administration for Community Living, SDM Fact Sheet)

6. BETTER OUTCOMES

Research shows that people using Supported Decision Making report greater self-determination, a higher quality of life, and better overall well-being than those under guardianship. And all that with a significant decrease in harm, abuse, or exploitation.

(Source: Shogren et al., "Supported Decision Making," Inclusion Journal, AAIDD, 2017)

7. GROWING LEGAL RECOGNITION

As of 2024, more than 20 U.S. states have passed some form of Supported Decision Making law or formal recognition. And that number keeps growing.

(Source: Disability Rights Advocates; NRCSDM State Law Tracker)

8. ROOTED IN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Supported Decision Making is grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Article 12 of the Convention states that people with disabilities have the same right to make legal decisions as anyone else.

(Source: United Nations, CRPD Article 12, 2006)

9. WHO IT'S FOR

Supported Decision Making is endorsed by leading disability organizations across the country, including The Arc, the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN), and the National Disability Rights Network.

(Source: Joint Position Statement on SDM, The Arc & AAIDD, 2012, updated)

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