



Network of 2018 for Sidney Skurkovich Facilitator: Janet Emison

The sign that Sidney Skurkovich stood next to at the end of the 2018 RI Women's March said, "Respect and Peace to every person." Maybe that motivating belief is why, when Janet Emison sustained a brain injury just weeks after the Skurkovich/Dorros family chose her to be the facilitator of Sidney's personal support network, Carol promised, "We'll wait."

After all, when Sidney was born, his prospects did not look so bright either. However as physicians, both parents know that today's symptoms do not always predict the future's outcomes.

Memory and communication difficulties led to four months of absence from Janet, but true to their word, Boris and Carol waited for Janet's healing to progress.

Janet experienced a lot of frustration because the medical establishment kept talking about her deficits, when she was thrilled to have "survived this terrible accident." During her long recovery, Janet saw how low expectations can negatively affect an individual's progress.

The parallels clicked one day when Janet and her husband, Marty, had taken Sid (aka "King Pin") bowling. A woman in the next lane had known Sid at RI School for the Deaf. The couple watched Sid and his friend communicate in "rapid fire signing" that Janet had not known was possible for Sid.

It was not Sidney's problem in communication, so much as the lack of signing among people whom Sid encounters. To help members of his personal support network become more fluent, one network member made YouTube spots to teach a few signs at a time. When that didn't work, Carol started teaching signs every quarter when the group assembles.

Janet recognizes that Sid's enthusiasm with members

of his circle conveys how much he appreciates the opportunities to engage in normal ways with people and enjoys their love and support.

Deborah and Rick (at right of photo) share an outing with Sidney in every season, for examples, picking apples in the Fall and baking Hannukah cookies in December.



Henri (at left of photo) and Ann have hired Sidney to do their recycling and then take him out to eat afterward. They make Valentine candy together each year.

Friends attended the Purim Spiel because it was important to Sid for them to see him in the chorus. They buy greeting cards featuring Sid's art to support this new entrepreneur.

Carol appreciates the proactive way Janet uses the newsletter and other forms of communication to prompt members of Sid's network to spend time with him. "She triggers people to connect with Sidney. . . essential because we wouldn't ask," Carol asserted.

One family who never needs prompting are Siobhan and Mike, backyard neighbors, who have a door in their back fence so that Sid can drop in independently and unannounced. Even their children know that means to break out the crackers, peanut butter and milk. Often Mike will just take Sid on errands with him and wind up the outing with pizza and chocolate milk.

John Susa, President of PLAN RI, observed that Sid, his family and his network facilitator consistently convey "respect and peace to every person." He added, "In return, Sid's friends and champions, his support network, return those values in kind to him. They recognize how far Sid has come since his rocky start in life. Like Janet, recovering from her injuries, they celebrate not just his surviving, but his prevailing."

