

AN SDMA SIGNED: A GUARDIANSHIP AVERTED

Shortly before the pandemic began, Luisa's parents started a guardianship proceeding in Surrogates Court, New York County. The Surrogate routinely appoints a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) in every case to develop relevant information about the person for whom guardianship is sought and to report that back to the court. In this case she appointed Yi Stewart, an attorney, who was able to visit with Luisa and her parents in person just before everything was shut down. Yi saw a bright and talented young woman who, she believed, might well be able to make her own decisions and avoid guardianship if she had appropriate decision-making support. She referred the family to SDMNY, just as the Surrogates Court effectively shut down.

In the meetings that followed, Luisa was enthusiastic about joining the SDMNY project, and her parents, who admitted they had no idea that there were alternatives to guardianship, were willing to let the court proceeding be adjourned while she tried the facilitation process. The next serendipity was matching Luisa, with all her artistic interests and talents, with our own Naomi Miller, herself an artist who had just joined SDMNY and completed facilitator training. The rest is history. (You can hear Luisa and her parents talk about the process as they were moving through it in this [video](#).)

Just last week Luisa signed her SDMA with many enthusiastic and committed supporters in attendance. She has been a passionate advocate about SDM, including with students in her school and their parents who did not know there were alternatives to guardianship. About SDM, Luisa's mom said it's important

...because once a young adult gets taught in detail the decision-making process, they are equipped together with their supporters to make their decisions, instead of having all rights taken away in guardianship and with that diminish their confidence.

And, as well, Luisa said

...it's the best kind of alternative to guardianship [and] when you get it down to the nitty gritty, you have freedom. It won't take anything or rights away from you.



Naomi, Luisa's dad Nuno, Yi (first row from left to right), Luisa's mom Nicola (second row right side), Luisa (last row right side) and her other supporters

We couldn't agree more, and for the happy ending to the story, Yi is writing her final report to the court. She's telling the Surrogate that, through the SDMNY process, Luisa is fully capable of making her own decisions, with the support of a great group of supporters including her wonderful mom and dad. They will now withdraw the guardianship petition, guaranteeing Luisa all her civil and legal rights. So

Congratulations Luisa, all your supporters, Facilitator Naomi, and especially Yi, for making Luisa's SDMNY journey possible!