

## CELEBRATING A HUMAN RIGHTS MILESTONE

Last Sunday marked the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an extraordinary document adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly in the wake of World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust. Premised in human dignity, equality and non-discrimination, the Declaration set forth the rights that belong to every human being and the responsibility of nations to protect and promote those rights for all. Although purely aspirational, the Declaration marked the birth of a human rights movement that has extended its reach into successive binding UN Conventions, and national laws, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); these, in turn, have inspired our work at SDMNY and passage of New York's Supported Decision-Making Agreement law.

The Declaration states, in Article 6, that "everyone has a right everywhere to be recognized a person before the law." A succession of UN Conventions intended to ensure that right for "vulnerable groups" (including women, children and racial and ethnic minorities) led to the CRPD and, critical for people with intellectual, developmental and cognitive disabilities, CRPD Article 12. That Article states explicitly that everyone has a right to legal capacity (the right to make one's own decisions and to have them legally recognized) and that governments have an obligation to provide people with disabilities with the supports they need to exercise that right. Article 12 leads both to SDM as the means by which everyone can make their own decisions regardless of disability, and to New York's SDMA law, legally requiring third parties to recognize those decisions.



We at SDMNY feel a special connection to this world-changing document because of its deep connections to our home at Hunter College. The UN Committee that wrote the Declaration was chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, whose East Side brownstone, Roosevelt House, is part of Hunter, and was the inspiring site of our first Advisory Council meeting in 2017. And, although less widely known, the Declaration was actually drafted at Hunter, at what was then its campus in the Bronx (now Bronx Community College).

In this challenging time, let us celebrate and reaffirm the fundamental principle enunciated in the Declaration's Preamble, that

**“recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”**