

JUNE 26 WAS A SPECIAL DAY FOR THIS DECISION-MAKER AND HIS FAMILY

It seems like June was a very productive month for SDMA signings. Having reported on one last week, we have a few more to tell you about this week and in the weeks to come. For one family, however, June—and especially the actual day of Decision-Maker Dimitri's SDMA signing—had special significance.

Thirty-four years ago, on June 26, 1991, Pavel, Dimitri's dad, flew from Russia to the United States, landing at JFK Airport in Queens. He didn't know where he would sleep that night or what lay ahead, but he got what sleep he could there at the airport and began the immigrant journey that led to a wonderful Russian-American family now happily settled in Brooklyn. As he said at the signing ceremony, "Today is a remarkable day for my family. It's the day that, 34 years ago today, I started a new life in America."



SDMNY's Karen and Joan

Dimitri with his supporters Gayane, Pavel, and Irini; Yuri and Ariel with their kid

June 26, 2025, was also a "remarkable day" for Dimitri, 22 years old, who graduated from his school *and* signed his SDMA on the historic date for his family. Mirroring Pavel, Dimitri's mom, Irini, said that, by signing, Dimitri was "beginning a new life." And, indeed, going through the SDMNY facilitation process has led to a new and different life than Dimitri might have had otherwise, as his parents had originally been considering guardianship for him. Facilitator Joan reflected on the transformation that occurred over time, during which they moved from "being overly protective to fully embracing the value of building and supporting Dimitri's autonomy and competence as a decision-maker."

In addition to his parents, Dimitri chose his brother Yuri, a State Trooper in Pennsylvania who gained confidence throughout the facilitation that Dimitri really can make decisions for himself and saw that happening “through a lot of repetition,” and Yuri’s wife, Ariel, mother of Dimitri’s twin cousins.

Dimitri’s final supporter was his comhab worker, Gayane, also Russian, who has known Dimitri since he was 12. Trained as a classical pianist, she has exposed him to geography, music, and chess, all of which have become strong interests. Dimitri recently received a certificate for passing all his chess classes at school, and with more free time this summer, plans to continue to mature as a chess player. Thinking further about his future, Dimitri wants to explore training to become a teacher’s aide.

There’s also a great “small world” story here that we can’t resist sharing. Before coming to the U.S., Pavel trained as a drummer at a conservatory in Russia, playing a variety of genres, including jazz. In passing, Joan remarked that her husband, Gary, was a jazz musician (indeed, he is internationally known as one of the world’s leading baritone saxophonists). When Pavel asked his name, it turned out that he had actually heard Gary play when Gary was on tour in Russia in 1987!

We often note that we are part of an international community of advocates for the human right of legal capacity, so we’re delighted that SDM has enabled this additional international connection. We are even more delighted that SDMNY facilitation has enabled Dimitri’s family to move from thinking guardianship was necessary to embracing his ability to make his own decisions with their loving support, and to take pride in his—and their—achievement: the SDMA they signed on the “remarkable date” of June 26.

**поздравления (CONGRATULATIONS) TO DIMITRI AND HIS
SUPPORTERS, AND Спасибо (THANKS) TO FACILITATOR JOAN!**