



Living the **American DREAM**

Profiles of DACA Recipients



The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)—the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States—works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations, NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. To achieve its mission, NCLR conducts applied research, policy analysis, and advocacy, providing a Latino perspective in five key areas—assets/investments, civil rights/immigration, education, employment and economic status, and health. In addition, it provides capacity-building assistance to its Affiliates who work at the state and local level to advance opportunities for individuals and families.

Founded in 1968, NCLR is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan, tax-exempt organization headquartered in Washington, DC, serving all Hispanic subgroups in all regions of the country. It has state and regional offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Phoenix, and San Antonio.

National Council of La Raza
Raul Yzaguirre Building
1126 16th Street NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036-4845
(202) 785-1670
www.nclr.org

© June 2015 by the National Council of La Raza.

All rights reserved

Living the American DREAM

Profiles of DACA Recipients

Acknowledgments

This compilation of stories is the result of a collaborative effort between the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), its Affiliates, and individuals who were willing to share their stories. NCLR staff Janet Hernandez, David Castillo, and Laura Vazquez and interns Gaby Gomez and Andres Macias interviewed the individuals and originally conveyed their stories as blog posts. The following NCLR Affiliates facilitated contact with the profiled youth: El Pueblo, Inc., Latin American Community Center, Latin American Youth Center, and Latino Memphis. NCLR thanks the individuals who agreed to share their stories with us and the broader public. They provide inspiration for our work.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction
3	Hareth
6	Yazmin
8	Jose
11	Jesus
14	Nadia
16	Carla
18	Joel
21	Katherine
23	Maria
24	Ana
26	Karina
29	Maria
32	Emilio

Introduction

These stories are the tip of the iceberg. In February 2015, NCLR began posting weekly on our blog about people who had received Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The idea was to reach individuals who would be eligible for expanded DACA and the proposed Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) program. By sharing how DACA has transformed people's lives, others would be inspired to apply.

Due to a federal court order, however, as of February 16, 2015 there has been a hold on DAPA and the expansion of DACA. Nonetheless, those who meet the requirements for the existing DACA program announced in 2012 can still apply and renew their applications.

More than 664,600 people have received administrative relief through DACA. These profiles demonstrate that while their individual stories vary, some common threads exist. Many remember celebrating the announcement of DACA three years ago, as well as celebrating the approval of their applications. They recount the individuals who helped them along the way, from school counselors and teachers to parents and family members who inspired them to work hard and pursue their dreams despite the challenges they faced.

In this compilation, we hear about what life was like before DACA and what it has meant for these recipients to receive a work permit and live without the fear of deportation. They came to the United States in different ways from all over the globe. They settled across the country, but all grew up with a strong desire to do well in school, help their families, and give back to their communities. These youth represent the ways that DACA can be transformative, from granting access to in-state tuition to facilitating higher education, better job opportunities, and driver's licenses.

While more than half of the eligible population has applied for DACA, hundreds of thousands of eligible people have still not applied. Moreover, the Migration Policy Institute estimates that there are approximately 473,000 young people who will become eligible for DACA once they turn 15 years old. As demonstrated by the stories here, DACA has allowed individuals to pursue their dreams and continue contributing to their communities. They also show that by blocking DAPA and the expansion of DACA, opponents not only keep families in limbo but also deny our country the substantial social and economic benefits that these programs offer.

Hareth



Hareth, with Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring, at a celebration recognizing DREAMers of Virginia's efforts in pushing for access to in-state tuition

Hareth Andrade planned to go to college ever since she was a little girl. She just never imagined the challenges that she would face in getting there. Hareth arrived in the United States without her parents at an early age, and it was years before she would see them again. They stayed behind in Bolivia, hoping that their daughter would have better opportunities in the United States.

With time, Hareth adapted to her new reality and excelled in school. She attended Washington High School in Arlington, Virginia, where she took Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes.

Hareth worked hard and her future looked bright. But one day, while visiting a University of Virginia camp for high school students interested in science, she learned that she would face challenges in pursuing her dreams because she was undocumented. Like many DREAMers, even though she worked hard and felt as American as her peers, she didn't have the paperwork to prove it.

Hareth explained, "I had heard about Social Security numbers, but I didn't know what that was. We didn't talk about it at home. One of the panelists was talking about financial aid and Social Security numbers. I was puzzled, so I asked, 'What if someone doesn't have a Social Security number?' The response was something I did not expect. It felt like a slap in the face."

Given her accomplishments in school and her talents, Hareth's opportunities seemed endless. However, after discovering the barriers to higher education that her undocumented status posed, she felt uncertain about her future. Thanks to the inspiration from her guidance counselor, Hareth realized that she could use her talents to push for policy change, so she started advocating for Congress to allow students like her, who had grown up in the U.S., to continue their education and pursue their dreams in the country they call home.

After graduating from high school, Hareth, along with other students, founded DREAMers of Virginia, an organization that has led efforts to provide access to in-state tuition for people who came to the United States as children and graduated from high school in Virginia.

She remembers when President Obama announced DACA. Hareth applied in the summer of 2012 and shortly after received her documents, including her work permit, in the mail. "The day I got the card, I called my mom crying, and I told her, 'Mom, it's happening! I am going to do all these things I want to do.'"

10,219 people have been granted DACA in Virginia as of March 31, 2015.

Source: USCIS

Now Hareth's life has changed in ways large and small. "Before it was so limiting," she said. "One time I could not get into the movie theater to watch the newest Harry Potter movie. I had to show ID to prove I was 18 years old, but since the movie theater staff didn't take my student ID and I had no state-issued ID, I was not let in. When I held DACA in my hands, it meant so much to me."

An estimated **25,000** people in Virginia are eligible for the current DACA program.

Source: Migration Policy Institute

Since receiving DACA, Hareth transferred from community college to Trinity Washington University, where she is pursuing a degree in international affairs. She expects to graduate next year and obtain a job in that field.

Thanks to DACA, there is a clear path for young people like Hareth to enter the workforce. “Applying for jobs has felt like an accomplishment. Writing my Social Security number on a piece of paper felt like an accomplishment. My entire life has been based on this number.”

Hareth has continued to advocate for opportunities for her peers. In 2014, DREAMers of Virginia was instrumental in securing access to in-state tuition in Virginia. Today DACA recipients are eligible to pay in-state tuition at some of Virginia’s colleges and universities, keeping higher education within reach.

When asked what she would like to see next, Hareth said, “I would like to see my parents included in DAPA. These programs shape lives. Our society can’t exclude the people who help the most. Otherwise we are not helping our country move forward.”

Yazmin

Like so many young people profiled in this space, Yazmin Abreu of Orange County, California, arrived in the United States as a child. She was eight years old, and her young mind could not fully grasp why her family was leaving what she thought was a happy life in Mexico. What she didn't realize was that her father, like many parents, was looking for a way to sustain his family, and coming to the U.S. was the chance to realize his potential. He decided to move first, and Yazmin, her siblings, and her mother would join later.

For much of her early life, Yazmin was not aware of her immigration status. She struggled some in school, though not with her academics. Rather, Yazmin had difficulty socially. Thanks to a great elementary school teacher who took an interest in her, she was able to overcome these challenges. In middle school Yazmin discovered that she was an undocumented immigrant. That revelation would affect how guarded she was about many details of her private life.

Despite the problems presented by her status, Yazmin was determined to go to college, though she knew getting there would not be easy. However, thanks to the California DREAM Act, she was able to pay in-state tuition. She also confided in a guidance counselor about being undocumented, and that counselor helped her in the college application process.

Although she was able to attend college, it wasn't always an easy road. Yazmin's commute to and from school was an hour and a half every day. Often she made use of the computer labs until they closed, and she wouldn't get home until midnight. She admits that it took a while for her to graduate, as she had to take some time off to raise funds for classes. Her hard work and dedication finally paid off when, in 2012, Yazmin graduated from California State University, Long Beach with a degree in health science education.

Freshly graduated and ready to work, Yazmin didn't find a job easily, especially due to her immigration status. Later that year, however, after receiving administrative relief through DACA, Yazmin hit the ground running, reveling in the practice of even applying for a job legally.

194,132 people have been granted DACA in California as of March 31, 2015.

Source: USCIS

“Right now, I can go to websites, look for jobs, and apply to them, and it is such a sense of freedom,” said Yazmin. She was even excited to go to the DMV. “I had the biggest smile on my face. I was finally able to set foot in there. That fear just goes away.”

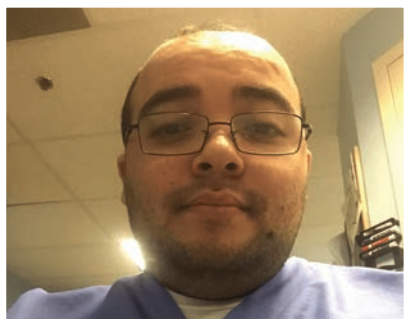
Yazmin is still searching for the right career, and she is determined to make it happen. In the meantime, she wants to ask those who are blocking expanded DACA and DAPA why they are so intent on deporting people who will contribute greatly to the United States, especially given the numbers of people who are already benefiting from relief.

“This country needs DREAMers like us, so why give it away?” she asked. “I know I’m going to achieve the American Dream. They need to think about the future.”

An estimated **343,000** people in California are eligible for the current DACA program.

Source: Migration Policy Institute

Jose



Jose is living his dream of working in the medical field.

When Jose Aguiluz was 15, he was involved in a severe car accident in his native Honduras. Desperate for help, his aunt contacted doctors at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. The staff were able to perform the required surgery, and it wasn't long before Jose and his aunt traveled from Honduras to the United States. His immediate family joined soon after so they could be by his side before and after the procedure.

The surgery came at a great cost, however. Jose's parents had to sell everything they owned to pay for it and to be with him.

That was almost 10 years ago. Yet it was a fateful event for many reasons. During his stay at the prestigious medical facility, Jose discovered his passion for medicine. It also marked the beginning of a new life.

Jose remained in the U.S.—a decision that was beyond his control—and in time his visa expired. Despite the hardships brought on by his undocumented status, Jose proved to be a spectacular student. Although his status barred him from receiving financial aid, Jose managed to find jobs to pay his tuition and fees at Montgomery College. His workday started at 5:00 a.m., followed by classes at night.

When the DACA program was established, Jose knew he had an opportunity to finally achieve his potential. He chose to pursue

8,161 people have been granted DACA in Maryland as of March 31, 2015.

Source: USCIS

a nursing degree and was dedicated to making this dream come true, no matter what obstacles were in his way.

“Education is the path we have to become someone in our lives,” said Jose.

Jose continued to balance work and school once he started his nursing education. Despite a hectic schedule, he became active in his community too. He worked to pass the Maryland DREAM Act by canvassing neighborhoods and encouraging people to get out the vote. This civic experience made the DACA announcement that much more special for Jose.

On the day President Obama introduced DACA, Jose went to NCLR Affiliate CASA de Maryland to talk with fellow youth organizers and share in the victory they had worked so hard to achieve. He filled out his DACA application, anxious to receive his work permit and finally advance toward his dreams. The best part was being able to take his board examinations. Since January 2014, Jose has been employed at Washington Adventist Hospital as a registered nurse.

An estimated **20,000** people in Maryland are eligible for the current DACA program.

Source: Migration Policy Institute

Jose has already achieved much, but the 23-year-old is just getting started. He continues to contribute to his community as a member of Casa's board of directors. He is also continuing his studies and plans to pursue an advanced degree in public health at the school where it all started: Johns Hopkins University.

Without DACA, Jose knows that getting to this point would have been nearly impossible, and he pleads with Congress and the 26 states that have blocked DACA expansion and the new DAPA program. "Only by removing these roadblocks can we show everyone what we're capable of," he says.

Jesus

As a gay undocumented youth, Jesus Chavez understands well the challenges of living with secrets. He grew up in California's Central Valley always aware of his immigration status but forbidden from speaking about it.

At 14, Chavez vividly recalls watching coverage of the 2006 immigration reform rallies in cities and towns across the country. It was then that he realized why his parents had gone to great lengths to ensure that he and his siblings kept their undocumented status quiet. The rallies were in response to an anti-immigrant measure passed in the House of Representatives that would have ramped up enforcement measures and deportations.

"It made me realize how dangerous it was to reveal this secret," said Chavez. "The idea of family separation...I couldn't live in the United States without my mom."

This early introduction to activism impacted Chavez's college and career decisions. He had always been a bright student in school. He excelled in academics and also exhibited athleticism, which he still credits with helping him stay disciplined.

When it came time to apply for college, he knew his status would pose financial difficulties, so he hustled to find the money he would need to attend. When he graduated from high school, Chavez had managed to win \$14,000 in private scholarships to help fund



Jesus Chavez at a 2013 immigration rally on the National Mall.

his academic career at University of California, Berkeley. It was a remarkable feat that showcased his tenacious spirit.

In college Chavez got involved with the undocumented youth movement, serving as the co-chair of Rising Immigrant Scholars through Education (RISE). When President Obama made his historic announcement on the creation of DACA, Chavez and RISE provided support to students who wanted to come out of the shadows. They worked with the law school's immigration lawyer to help students through the application process.

Ironically, when it came time to apply for himself, Chavez realized he found greater joy in seeing others celebrate their deferred action. "At the time, I was working three jobs and wasn't sure I would need DACA. I was happier for others because they realized they could now work legally, they could do study abroad programs," he said. "Now that I am working for myself, having DACA has been amazing. I've been able to not just get jobs that I like, but also grow professionally. Having DACA is something I'm really thankful for."

Jesus's professional growth and activism has indeed gained him recognition in his young career. In 2013, he moved to Washington, DC, to intern with the National LGBTQ Task Force. Today, he works as the operations manager for PFLAG, another LGBT civil rights organization. He also held posts with the Latino GLBT History Project and attended the Union=Fuerza LGBT Latino conference.

Most recently, Chavez received the "Next Generation Award" by Washington's LGBT magazine, Metro Weekly, for his commitment to improving the lives of all people. He admits to nearly rejecting the award because he didn't think his experience warranted the honor. He ultimately changed his mind, but when speaking about the award, Chavez's humility comes through.

“The Next Generation Award speaks to the undocuqueer movement and how they are using two identities to make themselves heard so we can reach equality,” said Chavez. “There are so many undocumented LGBT people who struggle, not only because they’re undocumented, but because they’re out and deal with lots of criticism. We need to keep fighting for what we think is right.”

Jesus’s story is certainly exceptional, and his accomplishments from college to now underscore the value of his contributions. The world is sorely in need of fighters like Chavez who are fiercely committed to advocating for what is right. Take DACA away and we lose a great talent. Chavez is an excellent example of why we must keep fighting for the president’s executive action on extended DACA and DAPA.

Nadia

At the age of four, Nadia Rivera and her parents embarked on a journey familiar to most American immigrants: the search for a better life. As many have done before us, Nadia's parents arrived in the United States full of dreams for their daughter. They dreamed of opportunities for a better education and a safer place to raise a family.

While in middle school, Nadia learned about the restriction she faced as an undocumented youth.

"I understood that not everyone is treated equally because of their status," said Nadia. "You learn that you are not legally part of the country, but you feel like you are just like every other American."

Nadia is now 18 years old and about to graduate from Bartlett High School in Memphis, Tenn. She will attend Christian Brothers University in the fall to pursue a degree in education. None of this would be possible, however, without DACA.

"Thanks to DACA, I can go to college and be anything I want. I would love to be a history teacher because history has helped me understand who I am," said Nadia.

Nadia is currently a volunteer at Latino Memphis, an NCLR Affiliate that has supported youth like her. "Thanks to Latino Memphis, I am able to go to college. They have motivated me to be anything I want to be," she said.

After receiving her work permit and her driver's license through DACA, Nadia also got a job at a clothing company.

"DACA gave me the power to move around and go to work without having to worry about being deported," said Nadia. "Now I have a license, auto insurance, and a job to pay for my expenses and save for college."

It is clear that recipients of deferred action have contributed tremendously to their communities. According to a national survey of 1,402 DACA recipients, approximately 61 percent have obtained a new job since receiving deferred action, and more than half have opened their first bank account. DACA has resulted in greater contributions to the workforce and economic integration.

But now it is time to also implement DAPA.

6,991 people have been granted DACA in Tennessee as of March 31, 2015.

Source: USCIS

“[DAPA] is really necessary because parents are the backbone of the family,” said Nadia. “How can they support their children if they don’t know how long they will stay together? If people would look around them, they would see an entire population that is ready to work and ready for DAPA.”

Nadia and the other DACA recipients profiled in this series demonstrate the benefits we all receive when immigrants can fully realize their potential. They highlight the need to move forward with the expansion of DACA and DAPA.

An estimated **11,000** people in Tennessee are eligible for the current DACA program.

Source: Migration Policy Institute

Carla

Carla Mena, a young aspiring American living in Raleigh, North Carolina, who received DACA in 2012, continues to be a committed and engaged member of her community. She is a sitting member of the Wake Health Services Board of Trustees and spends most of her spare time empowering youth through her work on the Youth Council at El Pueblo, Inc. This NCLR Affiliate taught Carla about the importance of helping Latinos achieve positive social change by building consciousness, capacity, and community action, a belief that has been part of their mission for over 20 years.

Most recently, thanks to her hard work and determination, Carla was promoted to Bilingual Project Coordinator, a full-time position at Duke University's Global Health Institute. Now that she is a permanent employee, Carla enjoys an array of benefits including, among others, health insurance and a well-deserved salary increase. With these benefits, she can not only increase monetary contributions to her family but also contribute more to the local economy. These opportunities, however, wouldn't have been possible had it not been for her new status resulting from DACA.

Carla recalls that she first learned about DACA on June 15, 2012. This date had a special significance to her and her family, as it marked the 10th anniversary of their arrival to the United States. "I had recently graduated from college, and learning about this opportunity was a relief," she said. "The first question I had was, when can I apply? My family and I hugged and cried from the emotion and the opportunity that this represented."

Today those memories are bittersweet, particularly because Carla fears that her parents—as well as thousands of other parents in the same situation—cannot join her in living the American Dream.

Although Carla's story represents the reality that hundreds of thousands of young DACA recipients currently face, it also corroborates an undeniable fact: DACA works. This program's effectiveness suggests that the implementation of DAPA could have an even greater impact on our country's economy and workforce.

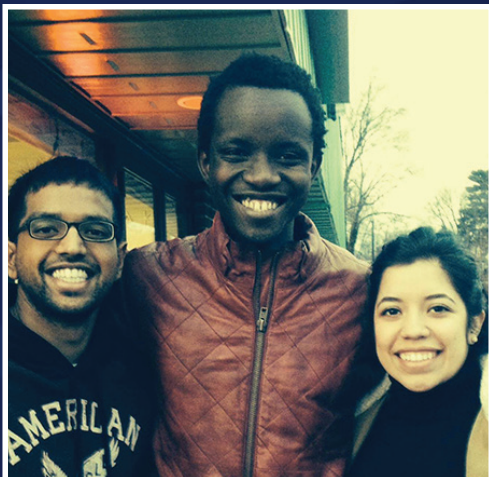
23,855 people have been granted DACA in North Carolina as of March 31, 2015.

Source: USCIS

DAPA would provide opportunities for millions of skilled immigrants to work in fields where they can earn and contribute more. If DACA recipients have demonstrated in just three years what this program can do for communities like Raleigh, perhaps it's time to consider something more stable. As Carla puts it, "Temporary programs are helpful, but a more permanent and more inclusive solution could be better." Carla's story attests to the social and economic benefits of administrative relief, however, the overhaul of our immigration policies remain a critical task that congress must undertake.

An estimated **33,000** people in North Carolina are eligible for the current DACA program.

Source: Migration Policy Institute



Joel Sati, center

Joel

Last summer, Joel Sati landed the opportunity of a lifetime. The 22-year-old student originally from Nairobi, Kenya, had been accepted into a summer research program hosted by Stanford University and would spend the next eight weeks furthering his interests in political philosophy and immigration theory under the mentorship of some of the brightest scholars in his field.

The City College of New York (CCNY)-Stanford summer exchange program invites CCNY's most talented students to spend a summer on the sunny Palo Alto campus conducting graduate-level research. Joel was one of ten students invited to participate in this highly selective experience. He was also one of two recipients of DACA who were selected.

"[It was] an awesome experience," Joel said. "The ability to sit with preeminent individuals in the field and have their feedback gave me a tremendous opportunity to grow in the field and develop high-quality work."

But if there is something more impressive than Joel's academic resume, it's his story. Rewind the clocks a few years and we'd be meeting a different Joel.

He'd be a high school student reeling from the discovery of his undocumented status just a few weeks shy of graduation. Facing a new set of financial roadblocks, he would no longer be a college-bound senior but rather one facing a life of uncertainty, his college and career aspirations shelved because of his immigration status.

After taking some time off from school, he tried again and enrolled at Montgomery College, but only for one class. "I wasn't planning on graduating," said Sati. "I wanted to see if school was the right fit and just wanted to take a philosophy class."

That class proved worthwhile. By his second semester at Montgomery, Joel was enrolled full time and was a member of the Renaissance Scholars Program. Outside the classroom, he was actively involved in the push for the Maryland DREAM Act and advocating for comprehensive immigration reform with the organization United We Dream. His activism was spurred by the "undocu-friendly" community he had discovered at Montgomery College.

In June 2012, his activism was met with a huge triumph. From the steps of the White House Rose Garden, President Obama announced the creation of DACA, ushering in new hope and a new beginning for so many caught in a broken immigration system and denied an opportunity to thrive in this great nation.

For Joel, the impact of receiving DACA was life-changing. After graduating from Montgomery College as a Phi Theta Kappa honor student, he was accepted into the Skadden Arps Honors Program in Legal Studies at CCNY. Today, the philosophy major juggles a full course load and an internship at an immigration law firm in Harlem.

“[DACA] had a far-reaching effect,” said Joel. “Since moving to New York, I’ve been able to get really amazing research opportunities. Next fall, I’ll be applying to Ph.D. programs in philosophy and hope to one day teach at the college level.”

Though DACA has opened a number of doors for Joel, he is mindful of the work that still needs to be done to fix our broken immigration system and ensure that everyone has a success story to share. He’d like to remind lawmakers in Congress who are working to undo administrative relief the following:

“The immigration system, as it is, is poorly constructed and leads to horrible conditions for many families. I know of a lot of undocumented people—both kids and parents—who do a lot for the better of their communities [but] get such a raw end of that deal.”



Katherine Perez, far right

Katherine

When Katherine Perez arrived in the United States from Colombia in 2005, she had one goal in mind: to get a great education that would pave the way to a better life. Her parents made the tough decision to leave their country after her mom got a job offer in the United States, the “land of opportunity.” Yet soon after settling in, the Perez family was met with a harsh reality: the attorney overseeing their immigration case had fled the country, their paperwork and savings in tow.

Despite this setback, the Perez family was determined to move forward. Little by little, the family worked to rebuild their lives in Maryland. While her parents worked, Katherine poured herself into her schoolwork, taking honors courses in middle school and participating in the International Baccalaureate program at her high school. Though she thrived academically, her immigration status put her at an extreme disadvantage.

“I was very dependent on what my parents could help with and provide for me. [With] no money of my own, unable to drive and attend events and school programs—I felt as if everyone else my age was ahead of me, and I was falling behind every day more and more,” said Katherine.

When the college application period rolled around, the legal and financial barriers multiplied. It quickly became clear that the road to a college degree would be challenging and extremely costly.

With help from supportive mentors, Katherine obtained a private scholarship that enabled her to enroll as a full-time student at Montgomery College and work toward an associate's degree. But economic difficulties at home meant she'd also have to juggle a part-time job to help support her two younger sisters.

As much as she tried, mounting pressures from school and work often led Katherine to question whether her degree was worth the hardship. Would the barriers of being undocumented ever be lifted?

On June 15, 2012, she got her answer by way of President Obama's announcement of the DACA program. Though initially hesitant, Katherine set her fears aside, submitted her application, and hoped for the best.

Today, the 22-year-old DACA recipient is a student at the University of Maryland. Since receiving DACA, Katherine has found a steady job and transferred to the University of Maryland, College Park, where she is pursuing a bachelor's degree in science. Thanks to DACA, she now looks to her future with renewed hope and resolve.

"I have a job and I am in the process of getting my driver's license. I can now save money to pay for next semester and help out at home with the expenses. I feel more empowered and in charge of my life," said Katherine.

Though these stories echo the power of DACA, they also echo the voice of an immigrant community eager to contribute to the progress and prosperity of the nation. Eager to prove the narrative of the American Dream is alive and well, and within reach. Katherine would like to remind those in Congress seeking to repeal DACA: "Even though we were not born in this land, we have grown to love and respect the national symbols, and to pledge allegiance to the flag. We are here not to bleed out the country, but to make it a better one and to contribute to [its] well-being."

Maria

When Maria Pacheco lived in Mexico as a young girl, she only saw her father once a year during vacations from his job at a nursery in Northeast Ohio. During the years of separation, Maria's dream was to have her family together again. Fourteen years ago, that dream seemed to be coming true when Maria and her mother came to the United States to be reunited as a family.

For years, Maria's parents were involved in the community and attended weekly meetings at HOLA, a community-based organization in Painesville, Ohio. It was at one of HOLA's meetings that Maria learned about DACA. She remembers that Tuesday night clearly since the meeting room was packed with community members eager to learn about President Obama's announcement on administrative relief. Maria immediately applied for DACA.

"When I received my DACA documents in the mail, I remember they said 'authorized to work.' I wanted to work so badly. I applied everywhere," said Maria. "I finally was hired at a store in the mall. I was using my ID card with my name on it and I was so happy to work there, just like any other teenager."

Later she worked at a local pizzeria to avoid the long ride to the mall. She worked diligently for two years and was promoted to assistant manager. Many Latino families became clients after Maria started working at the pizzeria, helping the business flourish. They were relieved to find someone who could speak to them in their native language.

Maria's ability to bring in customers who otherwise would have struggled to order their food was possible because of the work permit she obtained through DACA. According to the White House Council of Economic Advisers, the president's executive actions would increase the gross domestic product by \$90–\$210 billion, signifying a major boost to the economy. Maria's case is a real-life example of how that happens.

DACA has changed Maria's life. Since receiving it, she has obtained a job, is able to pay her taxes, and she will soon attend Lakeland Community College. Maria recently became president of the HOLA youth program and plans to engage and empower other Latino students like her. In May, Maria will also receive a teaching certificate from the Auburn Career Center. It will allow her to work with students as she pursues her career in education. Maria has already been offered a job working with young students during the summer.

3,532 people have been granted DACA in Ohio as of March 31, 2015.

Source: USCIS

"I always wanted to be a teacher. Teachers are role models who contribute to this nation," said Maria. "Immigrants, like teachers, have a lot to offer to our country" she said.

There are still millions of families waiting for the extension of DACA and the implementation of DAPA. Maria's story is one example of how these programs can create a positive impact in the community and the economy. The administration continues to push for the implementation of these programs, and Maria hopes the momentum doesn't stop.

"I want to tell the president to keep trying, to not give up!" said Maria. "I believe in you, President Obama; my parents should be next. I want to keep my family together."

An estimated **8,000** people in Ohio are eligible for the current DACA program.

Source: Migration Policy Institute

Ana

Activism can take on many forms. For some, it takes the form of community organizing or leading demonstrations. For others, that activism might take place online or at the voting booth. For Ana Angeles, a 30 year-old DACA recipient from Orange County, California, that activism has taken place in her home assisting would-be DACA recipients with their applications. It's something she has taken great pride in doing. While she never set out to serve as an advocate, it was during the experience of applying for DACA that she realized she had something to offer her community.

Ana has lived in the United States since she was 11. Her parents both left jobs at a university in Mexico in search of better lives for Ana and her younger sister.

As a student in the United States, Ana flourished. Indeed, as an outstanding member of the TEACH Academy, a high school program that preps future teachers, she was eligible to apply for a full scholarship to Vanguard University, a private Christian institution.

Ana ultimately graduated with a degree in business and with minors in math, religion, and accounting. She was excited to begin her career, but like so many young people in her position, she had to put those dreams on hold because of her immigration status. While she searched for a job, economic realities soon set in and she was forced to take one at a fast food joint. This would go on until the president announced the creation of the DACA program.

Karina



Karina (left), Representative Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), and Rosa, Program Manager for NCLR Affiliate Latin American Youth Center

The most recent snow storm to hit the Washington, DC, area could not stop Karina Velasco, a 25-year-old DACA recipient, from meeting with her congressional representatives and advocating for administrative relief. Since congressional offices were closed during National Latino Advocacy Days, Karina rescheduled her meetings to ensure Congress heard her story.

Her persistence comes from years of advocating for an opportunity to experience the American dream. Throughout her life Karina witnessed her parents' struggle, perseverance, and hard work. Her mother cleaned restaurants and houses while also being a full-time mother. Her father held two jobs in construction and housekeeping to make ends meet. Their encouragement and daily sacrifices helped Karina make the choice to focus on her education.

"My mother always told me that education was the path to success, so I decided to become a social worker to advocate for those in need," said Karina.

In 2012 she celebrated the president's DACA announcement, and gathered the paperwork needed to apply. She also helped fill out hundreds of applications for other DREAMers who were eligible to apply for DACA. Since Karina received DACA, she has obtained a driver's license, finished community college, transferred to a four-year university, and obtained a job. Having the job allows her to enter the workforce, pay taxes, and help others.

“Without DACA it would have been harder to accomplish this success. I can finally contribute to my country's economy and lift some of my parents' economic burdens,” said Karina.

This week, Karina met with her elected officials to highlight how well DACA works by demonstrating that she is an example of the program's success.

Like Karina, there are millions of other young Americans who need Congress to stand up for administrative relief rather than deny them the opportunity to contribute to the country and pursue the American dream.

Since receiving DACA two years ago, Ana has found work at a local education company as a program manager. It was a promotion from the community marketer position she had before. Having DACA made her eligible for the more substantive, full-time position.

Ana's willingness to help others navigate the DACA application process, which requires preparation, is what makes her advocacy so remarkable. She is very busy and has always assumed great responsibility as the oldest of her two other siblings. When she started her own application process, she was appalled at the huge fees many lawyers were asking for as payment to assist

with applying. Convinced that these lawyers were just taking advantage, Ana decided she would save her money and apply by herself. Through diligent research and organization, her dedication and commitment paid off eight months later.

In the two years since receiving DACA, Ana has helped friends and family successfully navigate the process, but like many advocates, she still asks herself what else she can do. It's a question that has come up a lot as her renewal period approaches. Ana is still figuring out how to answer that question, but whatever the answer is, her future certainly looks bright and includes the pursuit of an advanced degree.

In the meantime, Ana has a message for those in Congress who seek to undo DACA: "All we want to do is the right thing, to work, and to contribute. I love this country and all that it has given me. Just give us the chance to show you."



Maria

Though Maria Garcia has lived in the United States for 20 years, it is only during the past couple that the pursuit of the American dream seemed within reach.

In 1995, Maria's mother fled Mexico to escape an abusive and alcoholic husband. She brought the three youngest of her seven children to Delaware. Maria was the baby. Maria's uncle had gone there for work in the 1980s, so it seemed like a natural place for Maria's mother to take her family.

Maria was an excellent student. She excelled at all her subjects, especially her favorites: math and reading. It was during a visit from mentors in middle school that she decided what her future plans would entail. Maria told her counselors that she wanted to go to college.

Despite her undocumented status, Maria secured assurances from the University of Delaware that she could apply. The exorbitant costs of higher education, however, almost kept her from attending. Maria's status made her ineligible for any federal financial aid. Even most private loans were not an option, as many require legal permanent resident status.

With the help of friends and family and her tenacious spirit, Maria was able to land a full scholarship. It was exciting news, but her undocumented status would rear its head again throughout college and after.

1,209 people have been granted DACA in Delaware as of March 31, 2015.

Source: USCIS

“I had in my mind that by the time I graduated I would have my papers. But that was not the case,” said Garcia.

Maria graduated in 2005 and was ready to start her life. Armed with a double major and a willingness to contribute, her immigration status cut her dreams short, keeping her from finding substantive work. She took a job as a cashier to make ends meet. Maria had also started a master’s program, but her meager earnings made it difficult to pay tuition. Eventually she was forced to drop out. Maria had often questioned why she even went to college, but she also held on to hope that things would get better and that one day she would get her papers.

In 2012 that hope proved worthwhile. That year, President Obama announced the formation of the DACA program. By May of 2013, Maria had received her permit and she was on her way to making her dreams come true.

Maria still recalls the day she heard the news, which came from her cousin.

“She was like, ‘Oh my god! You won’t believe it!’ I really didn’t. My whole family was calling and texting. It was very exciting news.”

Upon receiving her permit, Maria immediately started job hunting in her field. She also started researching masters programs. By October, she found work as a domestic violence coordinator at the Latin American Community Center, an NCLR Affiliate.

For Maria, DACA has truly been transformative.

“I’m able to get a [driver’s] license; It gives me more stability with my work,” said Garcia. “It just improves my life so much. I’m also in the process of buying a house now, which was something we couldn’t do before.”

Maria’s not finished yet. Her future plans include finishing her advanced degree program in mental health therapy at Widener University. Eventually she plans on working toward a PhD.

None of this would be possible without DACA and without a commitment from policymakers to improve immigrant lives. Maria has message to those in Congress trying to block administrative relief for others like her: “Give us a chance. Do more research on how our workforce is going to help the economy and put less focus on the negative things always said about immigrants. That’s not who we are.”

An estimated **2,000** people in Delaware are eligible for the current DACA program.

Source: Migration Policy Institute

Emilio



Emilio Vicente (in blue) with Eva Longoria (left), NCLR President and CEO, Janet Murguía, and MSNBC anchor, Jose Diaz-Balart (right) at the 2013 NCLR Annual Conference

Emilio grew up in North Carolina and is currently a senior at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. We met him back in 2010 when he was regularly traveling from North Carolina to Washington, DC, to share his story with his senators and urging them to support the DREAM Act. Emilio became a regular at his senators' events; the senators and their staff knew that he was there to deliver a message of the DREAM Act's implications for him and for his state. He continued his advocacy efforts for immigration reform, joining NCLR during the National Latino Advocacy Days in 2011, and serving as a member of the NCLR *Líderes* Youth Advisory Committee. He also participated in a town hall panel at the NCLR Annual Conference in New Orleans alongside NCLR President and CEO Janet Murguía and Eva Longoria.

During this time, Emilio has worked at competitive internships in Seattle and Washington, DC, and has raised money for scholarships for undocumented youth. Last year, Emilio ran for UNC student body president and drew the attention of national press in doing so. The *New York Times* reporter who spent time with him during the campaign described Emilio as a “one-man whirlwind of engagement.”

On what DACA has meant for him, Emilio said:

“DACA for me means not being under the threat of deportation at any moment and being able to use my degree once I graduate. I can also sleep better at night knowing that my brothers and sisters-in-law, who qualify for DAPA, won’t be deported and separated from their families at any moment. We need a humane immigration bill that is permanent but until then, DACA and DAPA will protect many of us from the separation of our families.”

Once he graduates in the spring, Emilio hopes to continue advocating for immigration reform in Washington, DC. Receiving DACA will allow him to put his incredible talent and experience to use—so Washington better look out!

Notes

[illegible]

@NCLR |     | www.nclr.org