

Gabriela Neriz, 20, came to the U.S. at age 2 from Mexico ([CNN](#))



On Tuesday, September 5, Gabriela Neriz checked her phone. On it was the notification she hoped to never see: President Trump had decided to repeal DACA, the program that allows her to live and work in the U.S.

The 20-year-old, an operations supervisor at a JCPenney in Glendale, Arizona, immediately stepped off the floor to cry.

Neriz, whose parents brought her from Mexico to Arizona when she was two years old, said she's been saving to go back to school but is afraid to take out a loan until she knows for sure what's going to happen with DACA.

She said she currently works between eight and 16 hours per day at JCPenney, directing a team of nearly 50 people. She left college a year ago due to financial concerns, but wants to return.

“I have plans for myself, dreams that I really want to fulfill. I want to become a doctor. Without a job, how am I going to pay for school?”

Her DACA permit is set to expire in April 2019.

Bianey Nunez, 23, came to the U.S. at age 5 from Mexico ([CNN](#))



Bianey Nunez a 23-year-old nurse who works at Denver's Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center, is thinking about how to discuss her situation with her boss. They've never had that conversation before.

Nunez, whose DACA permit expires in August 2019, said she staffs more than six units at the hospital. Her myriad responsibilities range from aiding with bone marrow transplants to working in orthopedics.

“My job is a lot more than just a job to sustain me financially. I love my career. I love what I do. It's really something that brings me joy and satisfaction to help my patients,” said Nunez, whose parents brought her from Mexico to New Mexico when she was five.

She said there is “absolutely no way” she could work for a hospital without DACA.

“It’s even hard to think about it,” she said.

Jeong Park, 23, came to the U.S. at age 11 from South Korea ([LA Times](#))



When he was 11, Jeong Park's parents — a cab driver and a cosmetics saleswoman — sent their only child from Seoul to Southern California on a tourist visa, having saved money to enroll him in a private prep school in Van Nuys.

Park says his mother told him that, as a boy, he really needed to make the trip to explore America. But what he remembers is that he cried a lot on the plane.

He grew up, cared for by an uncle, with whom he still lives in Koreatown in Los Angeles. He graduated from Diamond Ranch High School in Pomona, later earning a political science degree from UCLA. He had no idea of his immigration status, due to his expired tourist visa, until he tried to get a driver's license as a teen.

Now 23 and a DACA recipient, Park struggled with his emotions on Tuesday, September 5 after hearing the program could end in six months. He said the public may not be aware of the great diversity among DACA recipients.

“I know that most undocumented faces you see are Latino faces. But I hear that there are thousands and thousands of people from other cultures. Not everyone needs to be silent,” he added.

He has been hunting for a tutoring job, a reporting job at a newspaper, or a public relations job at a nonprofit. Now he worries about that job search.

“When people do their research after interviewing you, they will know what your situation is. But I don't want to be in the shadows. There's not that many undocumented youth who have the power or the opportunity to share their stories — and if I do, I should just do it,” Park said.

His DACA papers expire in August 2018. Park could choose to be upset, or depressed, but he doesn't. “I'm hopeful. I've seen a lot of statements from Republican congressmen and senators who appear understanding” about the need to keep the DACA program. “Maybe this is one step back, two steps forward.”

He's been getting inspiring messages from friends on social media. And one fact propels him: “The truth of the matter is 12 million immigrants have survived — DACA or no DACA. You're not going to be able to get rid of all of them,” he said. Park doesn't think about returning to South Korea. He understands his parents sacrificed so he might find success in a professional career in the U.S. This past summer, he finally saw his father for the first time since leaving his homeland. His dad came to his college graduation.

Gregory James, 20, came to the U.S. at age 9 from St. Lucia ([LA Times](#))



A “lifeline” — that’s how Gregory “Ronnie” James of Brooklyn had viewed DACA.

“Now that lifeline has been taken away,” he said Wednesday.

James was 9 when his mother — who was living in the U.S.

illegally, working as a

babysitter — sent for him and his older brother from their Caribbean island home of St. Lucia. In New York, he attended Aviation High School in Long Island City. When his mother heard about DACA in 2012, she urged James and his 24-year-old brother to apply.

After receiving DACA, his brother found work as a security guard, then as a nursing assistant. James enrolled at Borough of Manhattan Community College in a two-year associate’s program in communications, then transferred to City College, where he is a junior majoring in international studies.

“I have a scholarship that’s tied to receiving in-state tuition. If I lose DACA, I can no longer afford school, basically,” James said by phone in between classes Wednesday.

James, 20, was recently hired to intern for a member of New York’s City Council. He starts later this month, since his work permit doesn’t expire until 2019. James said that after Donald Trump was elected, he figured DACA was doomed, but maybe that wasn’t such a bad thing.

“DACA was never a permanent solution to fixing the immigrant situation of Dreamers or our parents,” he said, adding, “I don’t think it’s a Latino issue, it’s an issue for immigrants A more permanent solution is needed.”

He said the U.S. is at a crossroads and must decide how it treats not only “Dreamers,” but all immigrants, Muslims and people of color.

“Are we the country that makes dreams come true or that takes it away from anyone who is ‘the other’?” James said.

Armando Carrada, 27, came to the U.S. at age 7 from Mexico ([LA Times](#))



Thanks to DACA, Armando Carrada worked three jobs, graduated with an associate's degree last year and won a full scholarship to study hospitality management at Florida International University outside Miami.

Carrada, 27, started classes last week, but the campus was closed Wednesday due to the

impending arrival of Hurricane Irma, another stress on his family.

Carrada's mother brought him and his younger sister to the U.S. illegally from Oaxaca, Mexico, when he was 7. Now she runs a nursery, but she relies on his youngest sister, a citizen born in the U.S., to drive her to work since she can't get a driver's license.

Ending DACA, he said, will mean, "Students are going to lose the opportunity to support their families, not just monetarily."

His sister and brother-in-law also received DACA, got driver's licenses and started a trucking business.

"So what happens then? She loses a business that is helping the economy and promising a job to other people," Carrada said.

His sister also works as an intensive care technician at a local hospital. She just took maternity leave after having her first child two weeks ago, a girl.

"She called me today and she was just freaking out," Carrada said Tuesday, the day President Trump announced he was ending the program.

His sister has an appointment to renew her work permit for another two years. Carrada's permit expires in October 2018. He's not hopeful Congress will save the program by then.

"They just focus on something else and leave this on the back burner," he said. "If something was to happen in Congress, I hope that includes a lot more people. I'm a Dreamer, but my mother had a dream when she came to this country, too."

For now, Carrada said he will focus on organizing fellow Dreamers and "making sure people are not in fear." "We already came out of the shadows and then this happened. We don't want people to be like, 'I don't want to talk or go to rallies,'" he said.

Sumbul Siddiqui, 24, came to the U.S. at age 4 from Saudi Arabia ([LA Times](#))



Sumbul Siddiqui, who does not have health insurance, dreams of advocating for this "most basic of rights" for people in the country illegally.

She also dreams of becoming a doctor, and her enrollment in DACA seemed a step toward meeting that goal.

Born in Saudi Arabia to Pakistani parents, and now living in Atlanta, she works as a medical scribe, handling records and taking notes for doctors examining patients. She's also a volunteer at a low-income community clinic, where she's been able to digitize all the paper charts amassed from steady streams of immigrant and local clients.

"What led me to medicine is the lack of access we have to knowing what's going on and what we can do to take better care of our health. We're part of the underserved simply because we're undocumented," Siddiqui said.

She earned a bachelor's degree in neuroscience from Agnes Scott College in Georgia and is now taking a gap year before applying to medical school in hopes of working with marginalized populations that "need our help more than ever."

Trump's rejection of DACA, she says, "doesn't make me so angry. More than anything, I feel hurt — and that hurt pushes me to try harder. A lot of people assume that the undocumented are this way or that way, but the reality is we're all different and we're from different races. As a recipient, we have nothing to hide because when we apply to DACA, we go through background checks and we open up our lives to the government."

Her message to the American public is to "please, don't make assumptions" about those without legal papers. "Really get to know us."

Siddiqui has lived in Georgia for 20 years, arriving as a 4-year-old on a journey that unfolded when her father, a former travel company manager, applied for a tourist visa that later changed to a business visa when he decided to open a gas station in the state. Now the Siddiqui siblings have mixed immigration status, with her and a younger brother classified under DACA, while two other siblings were born in the United States.

"My mother had heard of these great American opportunities here and she always pushed for us to have the best education," Siddiqui said, having promised her parents not to lose sight of that ongoing goal. "This is why I decided to speak up. There's a lot of fear, but if you don't speak for yourself, who knows you as well?"

Gordon Ip, 22, came to the U.S. at age 4 from Hong Kong ([LA Times](#))

When Gordon Ip said goodbye to his parents this month and returned to the University of Nebraska Omaha for the fall semester, he knew it might be a very long time before he saw his mother and father again. They could be detained and even deported to Hong Kong at any moment. The Ips have lived in Southern California for 18 years, but none of them has a valid visa, permanent green card or citizenship papers. For now, Ip is secure; he was 4 years old when the family arrived in the U.S., and the Obama administration granted him temporary protection under DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. But President Trump has made no promises about Ip and his fellow Dreamers, and his executive orders make it clear that Ip's parents — a nail salon worker and a construction worker — are at risk. Ip, 22, spoke to Daniela Gerson by phone from his family's home in Alhambra.

All I feel is fear. I worry about my parents being ripped away from me. I worry about succeeding, and them not being here to see their hard work pay off.

We came up with a back-up plan if they get deported. "Finish your education here," they told me. "Otherwise, what did we do all of this for? What did we sacrifice all these years for?"

People never suspect me of having immigration problems. "OK, so why do you want to know about DACA?" people ask when I show up at a know-your-rights meeting or the financial aid office. I don't blame them. I didn't suspect either.

I was 17 and applying to colleges when I told my parents at dinner one night that I needed my Social Security number. My mother, father and brother stared down at their rice bowls. All I could hear was the click of chopsticks on porcelain.

I don't understand everything my parents say in Cantonese, and they don't understand everything I say in English. It was my older brother who eventually explained to me that we aren't legal immigrants. I finally understood why he ended up at community college, and why we had never visited the rest of our family in China or Hong Kong.

How was it possible that I could not have known? I'd been watching news stories about immigrants for years. But the debate was always about the Mexican-American border.

I did not know stories like my parents' existed. My father saved for more than 15 years to move to America. But once we landed in L.A., legal advisors scammed him. We were left with basically nothing, and because we overstayed our tourist visas we were ineligible to become legal residents.

Two days after I graduated high school I got DACA status. My father greeted me when I came home, his eyes glowing with joy like I'd never seen before. "Our struggles are over," he told me. "We've finally made it in America."

My parents' status stayed the same, but DACA changed my life and my brother's. I received a state scholarship to UNO. I'm on the speech and debate team, and to know that I can cross state boundaries without fear of deportation relieves so much stress. My brother graduated from Cal State Long Beach, and right away got a job in graphic design.

I never thought Trump could win. And then I heard our new president saying, "We're going to start deporting you now. We're going to find you."

For a few months after the election, I was just praying.

As I traveled with the speech team, I got to know another side of America. I saw Confederate flags. Someone called my African American coach "boy." Even in the blue-dot city of Omaha, I felt a change. Someone called to me, "Learn to drive, you chink."

When I came home to Alhambra it was a relief, but I also noticed a Trump sign on my street. How can you live in a community that is so ethnically diverse, and still support someone who wants to kick us out?

My friends here think Trump is a joke, but they have sort of accepted that he is president. They can do that. They are mostly children of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants, or Latino. They're all citizens. Some of them know that my situation is a little different, but I don't think any know that I could be kicked out of the country.

My solace has been ethnic food. When I enter a Hong Kong café on Valley Boulevard or a taco stand on Cesar Chavez, nobody wants to talk about immigration or politics. I look at the guy next to me going in on a shrimp cocktail, and I'm eating like eight fish tacos, and I realize we just need to take this one moment away from the news. That's solidarity.

My whole family understands that we have to spend every waking moment appreciative of each other. We talk about drama happening at my mom's nail shop. We talk about what my dad learned watching YouTube videos about Chinese history. We eat my favorite sweet-and-sour pork ribs that my mom taught me this summer how to make. Just being able to sit with my family — that's what I'm going to be craving in Nebraska.

Dr. Aguilar is the first DACA recipient to earn a PhD, came to the U.S. at age 5 from Mexico ([Americas Voice](#))

Yuriana's future hinges on the future of DACA.

As a researcher at UC Merced, Dr. Yuriana Aguilar, the daughter of undocumented farm workers, was already breaking barriers as the first undocumented student to get her doctorate at the school. Her dream is to one day open her own medical research lab, and the work she's doing now — “looking at mouse hearts to figure out what happens in the human heart just before sudden cardiac death” — could one day save your life or mine.

She came to California from Mexico with her farmworker parents when she was 5. None of them have immigration papers.

“Everybody has the American dream,” Aguilar says. “They think, ‘We’re going to strive, we’re going to have our own homes, our own businesses.’ My parents have not been better off economically. But they see the American dream fulfilling in me. That keeps me going.”

Aguilar has worked her way through school picking watermelons, cleaning hotels and selling produce at flea markets.

“There are fears. I fear that if I’m in the flea market, and they’re doing deportations or something, nobody’s going to care that I have a title,” she says.

As an undergraduate, Aguilar wasn’t eligible for many grants and scholarships. Her parents sold enchiladas and vegetables to help pay her costs. Once she got her bachelor’s degree, she was working as an unpaid volunteer in the lab when the Obama administration announced Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA.

“I remember, I was here in the lab when I was watching the news about DACA. I cried,” she says. “I was here with the heart, so that was very emotional. To see that I could actually do this, that it would allow me to continue to work here.”

Ana Torres, Aguilar’s mother, starts to cry as she says how proud she is of her daughter getting her Ph.D.

“I am crying, but they’re happy tears,” says Torres. “Before, I was crying tears of sadness. Especially when Yuriana would call me to tell me that people cared more about her documents than about her intelligence or her perseverance in getting ahead.”

“Thank you for believing in me,” says Yuriana, “even though there were so many obstacles in our way. I remember you always told me that no one can take away your education. The government may not give you papers, but they can’t take away your learning.”

“That’s right,” says Torres. “I always told you that learning lasts you your whole life. It’s the only inheritance you’re going to get from us, and as long as we have feet to stand on and hands to work, we’re going to support you.”

Luisa Lopez Alejandre, 18, came to the U.S. at age 5 from Mexico ([LA Times](#))



Luisa Lopez Alejandre, 18, has found herself among those joining the call.

For most of her life, the Santa Ana resident has felt no need to hit the streets in protest. Arriving illegally from Mexico at age 5, Alejandre received DACA status and never envisioned cleaning hotels off the books

like her mother. Instead, she took on extra coursework in high school and set her sights on becoming a sociologist.

But after Trump was elected, Alejandre reassessed her future. She began attending immigrant rights rallies and delved into the movement.

On Tuesday, the day the DACA phaseout was announced, Alejandre found herself holding an American flag and a megaphone, addressing a gathering of hundreds.

“You are more than DACA ... or an alien,” she cried. “You are a human being.”

Rocio Lopez, a product designer in Silicon Valley, has also found herself becoming more vocal. The 28-year-old recently began revealing her status as a Dreamer to co-workers and acquaintances and changed her Facebook photo to one supporting DACA.

Lopez works inside the kind of glass office buildings her parents once cleaned after they left Mexico and arrived in East Palo Alto. Nearly every aspect of her life has been shaped since then by DACA. The program gave her “peace of mind,” allowing her to focus on her career and work for traditional companies that offered benefits.

She has been able to help support her parents and pay their medical bills.

“But now, every day I come into work, it’s like I have a ticking bomb,” Lopez said.

“It’s hard. I work with other product designers and everyone is rising, becoming senior product designer, eventually principal, and then director. And to know that is not a path for me is very depressing.”

Although she is surrounded by many who espouse progressive views on immigration, Lopez said she still comes across those who are shocked to learn her status.

“The problem is people don’t understand it’s their neighbors, it’s the people they went to school with,” she said. “I am not an illegal alien. I am more than some pieces of papers. I am more than just a green card, I am more than just a visa. I am a human being.”

Bryan Peña, 18, came to the U.S. from Guatemala ([LA Times](#))



Bryan Peña's parents led a life in the margins.

They were immigrants living illegally in Lincoln Heights, having made the trek from Guatemala when their son was small enough to be carried on their backs. His father found work refinishing cars, and his mother cleaned homes. Both carefully guarded their past.

Peña, however, attended a social justice-themed high school, explored interests in basketball, film and cooking and recently began studying nursing at Cal State L.A.

The 18-year-old is forthright about his status as a so-called Dreamer, once even telling his own story to a crowd at an immigration rally.

Despite President Trump's removal of the shield that has protected 800,000 Dreamers from deportation, Peña refuses to suddenly slink into the shadows. Instead, he plans to get louder, more public, more emphatic about his right to stay.

"This is where I want to live," Peña said. "This is the only life I know."

Marwin Luminarias, 32, came to the U.S. at age 12 from Hong Kong **([LA Times](#))**



“Nearly 20 years ago, I flew to San Francisco alone with two huge suitcases and an old photograph of my grandfather and uncle; I was 12 and I still remember all the flight attendants being so amused that I was traveling all the way from Hong Kong alone. My first contact with a U.S. immigration officer resulted in me being detained. It

took a few hours before they finally stamped my passport and allowed me entry.

I was never told why I was detained. Did I make a mistake?

I find myself asking that same question today. My father was on an H-1B visa, and by the time I was in high school, it became clear that I did not enjoy the same opportunities as my friends and classmates. I had an H-4 visa, but I could not work, drive or accept any scholarships. I was offered a full ride to a university, which was rescinded upon discovery of my immigration status.

I was 20 when my father went to renew his visa and was told that I would be ineligible to be his dependent when I turned 21. I was in the middle of nursing school, paying nonresident tuition despite having lived here for years. Thus began my years working under the table as a caregiver and then a nursing assistant.

I was almost 25 when I had saved enough money to enroll at Fullerton College. That same year, President Obama created the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA. I do not exaggerate when I say that DACA changed my life. Without it, I would not have been able to work part-time while going to school. I was no longer at the mercy of unscrupulous employers, having been granted the same legal protections as any American worker. I could call in sick, qualify for vacation pay and get health insurance.

If you believe that getting rid of me and those like me will make America great again, then you have misunderstood what it means to be American. All my life, Americans taught me the value of hard work and sacrifice. I was told that grit was the key to the American dream. People like me have lived most of our whole lives among you — we are your neighbors, your co-workers, your friends.

Killing DACA will not solve your immigration problem, but it will kill our American dream.”

Kok-Leong Seow, came to the U.S. at age 6 ([NY Times](#))



None of my friends from my hometown know.

My parents raised me to be gritty, never to complain or take handouts. I didn't want to have a victim mentality or be known for being undocumented. But I realized that sharing my

story would be therapeutic, raise awareness, and help other underprivileged people.

I came to America when I was just six years old. My parents grew up poor and risked so much to move us here with hopes of giving us a better life. My dad is a waiter at a small restaurant, which is enough to put food on the table and clothes on our backs. We pay taxes, abide by all laws, and don't live on welfare. As for me, I can't legally work, drive, fly, or have health insurance. I've missed out on numerous opportunities because of my situation.

Fortunately, I was able to pursue college. Fast forward four years, I have graduated Magna Cum Laude in Computer Engineering from Wichita State University. I was at the top of my class, number one in my major, wrote 2 first-author papers, won research awards, and have a patent pending. Consequently, I was accepted into graduate school at Columbia University. However, due to my status, I'm unable to obtain a stipend to continue my education. Receiving DACA would grant me the opportunity to acquire the funding I need, provide for my family, and master my craft to realize my full potential. But due to the election results, applying for DACA is simply not a favorable option anymore.

Without DACA, many live in daily fear of deportation. I've had friends whose families were torn apart. I've seen my friends dig food out of trash cans to help feed their families. These are genuine, everyday struggles and it's easy to dismiss it because it's not happening to your family. To truly empathize, you need to dig deep and allow yourself to feel our pain and anxiety. DACA alleviates some of the fear and provides hope. Many non-Native Americans seem to forget that they, too, have immigration in their blood. Just like everyone else, we simply want an opportunity to contribute to the only home that we know. Ironically, I've enjoyed the adversity, I feel alive under pressure. I'm unfazed and undocumented. I'm not going anywhere.

Gargi Y. Purohit, came to the U.S from India ([NY Times](#))



“I think you should get married after you graduate high school.”

These were the words my SAT tutor said to me during my college consultation visit. Halfway through making my college list, he abruptly halted the conversation and for a moment, my future. He did not think that I was fit for college despite my top-notch academic record that I maintained since the day I entered pre-kindergarten. The only viable option he saw for all undocumented youth was marriage.

My name is Gargi Yogen Purohit and I am an undocumented immigrant. I was born in India and grew up in the diverse streets of Jackson Heights, New York City since third grade. I have worked hard to not only help

myself but help those in my undocumented community.

My mother decided to move to America because it is where dreams of hard work, sprinkled with luck, equal success. When President Obama created DACA, it gave me the opportunity to attend the University of Notre Dame where I am pursuing my goal of getting a PhD in Economics. DACA allows me to work not only as a research assistant to Professor Jeffrey Bergstrand, but also as a tutor at the Notre Dame Writing Center. Honing my writing and research skills will not only advance my career but will also advance the careers for my fellow undocumented peers at Notre Dame.

While Notre Dame has provided numerous opportunities for its DACA students, there is still a lot more work to be done. I am the second generation of undocumented students that Notre Dame has publicly accepted. Last summer, I conducted research on medical schools' admission policies for undocumented students. This research is critical for the campus Career Services when providing guidance and up-to-date information for current pre-med majors looking for medical schools that are most “DACA friendly.”

DACA gave me the opportunity to not only help myself, but also to help the undocumented community at the University of Notre Dame. If DACA is rescinded, this would set back an entire generation of smart, driven, and accomplished students.

DACA gives undocumented youth the opportunity to succeed on our own so that marriage is not our only viable option.

Ricardo Morones Torres, came to the U.S. at age 4 from Mexico ([NY Times](#))



My name is Ricardo. My parents brought me to the United States from Jalisco, Mexico, at the age of four. I have been living in the U.S. for twenty-six years. I am an American, and I consider this country to be my home.

I know how challenging life can be when you are living in the shadows as an undocumented immigrant. Prior to DACA, getting a job was nearly impossible, and Dreamers were under the constant threat of deportation. When I graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor's in Political Science in May 2012 and became a first-generation college graduate, I wanted to celebrate like every other student. But, I really could not because of my status and the uncertainty regarding my future in the U.S. However, my life drastically changed with DACA. I

was able to get my driver's license and my first car. I was also able to use my degree by getting a professional job. My life was filled with joy and hope. I was motivated to pursue higher education. Because of DACA, I was able to obtain a Master's in Public Administration (summa cum laude). Because of DACA, I was motivated to go to law school; I am currently a first-year law student. I dream of becoming a prosecutor, so I can fight crime.

I am thankful for the Obama Administration because DACA changed my life and the lives of my undocumented brothers and sisters. I implore President-elect Donald Trump to keep DACA. I am not a threat; I love this country as much as he does. I want to fight crime as much as he does. If President-elect Donald Trump does not like DACA, I implore that he work with Congress to reach a bipartisan solution to the situation of dreamers and other non-criminal productive undocumented immigrants who love this country.

Mariana Castro, came to the U.S. from Peru ([NY Times](#))



I kissed my father goodbye without knowing it may be the last time I ever saw him. I arrived in Florida with my mother on September 1st, 2005 after a 5-hour flight from Peru leaving our whole family behind. I understood things will be different, we would be alone, but yet the atmosphere in Florida felt safer. I quickly adapted to the American educational system easing my way out of ESOL and into advanced classes. Growing up undocumented, I was unsure about my future. I knew that regardless of my excellent grades, involvement, and community service my status would

impact, or potentially stop my education.

When DACA came along, I saw a light at the end of the tunnel. I was able to provide for my family, obtain a job, and no longer live in the shadows. I graduated from the prestigious International Baccalaureate program with the state's highest academic scholarship and chose the University of Florida to be my home for the next four years.

A week before classes started I was told that my tuition costs would triple and that my only financial aid would be pulled - all because of my immigration status. Tears filled my eyes thinking that college was a dream that I may never be able to make a reality, but instead of packing my bags, I fought back for my right to higher education. Fighting for tuition equity for undocumented students across Florida sparked my passion for social justice and taught me that together we are unstoppable. Since then I have utilized my voice to speak for immigrant rights and human rights, as well as started programs that provide visibility to undocumented students at my university.

Today, I am working towards a Bachelor's of Sciences in Biology with a minor in Latin American studies. Next semester, I will be interning with the Florida Senate to learn firsthand how I can help push for change for other marginalized communities across the state. My plan is to attend Law school and continue fighting for immigrant families.

Immigrant youth like me want nothing else but to further their education and give back to their community. This country needs a solution to the broken immigration system that continuously threatens to separate families, DACA is good first step. As Americans, we must recognize the contributions of immigrants and reject the anti-immigrant sentiment that has taken grip of our nation.

Anayancy Ramos ([NY Times](#))



I learned to live as an American before the memories of my homeland solidified into a permanent impression. My mother tongue was forgotten as I learned to speak English, weakening the profound virtuosity of my heritage and re-shaping my family's mannerisms and grandiose personalities. In pursuing the American Dream, my parents not only offered their lives, but also their youngest daughter.

In spite of losing my ancestors that both defined me and were unknown to me, I have fought for the new self I have built up from the ashes of the broken dreams

they tried to burn down. While in community college, I steadfastly held the distinction of a Dean's List scholar and successfully completed the requirements for earning an Honors Certificate, by completing eight Honors courses. I held the merit of being inducted into an honors society, Phi Theta Kappa, and was appointed president of the Alpha Beta Gamma chapter the following year, all the while working full time at an animal hospital.

I poured the desperation I felt over being denied my education at the top research schools in Georgia into my school and work: I rose to the position of manager at the animal hospital and was the sole student awarded the distinction of Student of the Year in Biology out of the total college population of 21,000+ students. In an attempt to continue my education further than a two-year Associates Degree, I was chosen from a pool of thousands as a semifinalist for the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship; later that year I was offered a different private scholarship to attend Eastern Connecticut State University, at no cost to me. In another two years' time, I will graduate with a double major in Biochemistry and Biology. Four years was all it took for me to effectively and irrevocably pursue the education I have proved that I deserve. However, these dreams have an expiration date. Every two years, I must go through the taxing process of applying for DACA. Every two years, these dreams may die. Until then, I breathe the heart and soul of my denied ancestors into my studies to keep them alive and to keep them ingrained in my pursuit of the American Dream.

Julia Verzbickis, came to the U.S. at age 9 ([NY Times](#))



When I was 9, my family and I moved to the United States to find some stability that wasn't present in our home country. We always had plans to make the move permanent, and the seemingly endless paperwork process began nearly immediately.

However, we didn't know what we were in for. The lawyer we had turned out to be fraudulent, and as a result,

my parents, my sisters and I all lost our status in the country. It was the summer before my first year of high school.

The future remained unclear, but I made some choices. I chose to keep my grades up in school. I chose to give myself the opportunity at a future. I worked hard. I graduated 28th in a class of 620. I had a 3.6. I got into Rutgers early admission.

The week after my twenty-first birthday, I got notice that my DACA application had been approved. Within 12 hours, I'd applied for a social security card, and within a week, I'd filled out dozens of job applications. I got a license for the first time, ever.

In November 2014, I got into Teach For America. I was placed in San Antonio, 1,800 miles away from New Jersey. I graduated college the following May, cum laude, with a double-major in English and Journalism.

In August 2015, I started teaching. I also met the man that would become the love of my life. I had a new life in a new state, and I was all by myself for the first time ever. I couldn't be more excited.

I've been teaching middle school since then, and I love it. My kids are amazing. They drive me nuts on any given day, but I love them.

DACA gave me my independence back. It's the single reason I can teach, live on my own, and pay for my car. I feel like I belong in the country I have lived in for 15 years.

Knowing that I could lose all the freedom I've gained is a paralyzing fear. I've worked so hard, and my life was just coming together, and now it might fall apart again. I hope that doesn't happen, but if I've learned anything these last 15 years, it's to hope for the best and prepare for the worst

Vanessa Rodriguez, came to the U.S. from Mexico ([NY Times](#))



My name is Vanessa Rodriguez and they call me Undocumented Dreamer. Undocumented because I was born south of the United States border and Dreamer because that was the inherent last name that my parents gave me when they risked their souls to give me a better future.

I have lived in Texas for 12 years, and for 12 years I have known no other home. My father works in construction and my mother works as a house maid. Their hard work and humble occupations have given my family a chance

to do more and dream higher; a chance that made me the salutatorian of my class and a recipient of the State of Texas Student Hero Award.

However, their work only granted me a chance to dream; not a chance to accomplish. Only the government could grant me that. So for years I lived under the notion of fear and uncertainty. Dreamers like me kept their dreams and secured them in a box called “Limitations”. It wasn’t until the arrival of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) that things changed for us. DACA enabled us to pursue and achieve more. For me it meant an opportunity at pursuing higher education, obtaining a job, and acquiring something called “temporary security”. One year of this security from deportation was what made the beginning of my dream a success. I was free from the fear of deportation and that enabled me to gain confidence in my abilities.

A few weeks ago I finished my first semester at The University of Texas at Austin, and although I was a full-time student with two part-time jobs, I still managed to obtain an outstanding GPA. DACA has made all these accomplishments possible and it has been the difference between simply existing and living a dream.

As the time approaches for the new administration to come in, the fear is starting to become more evident. The uncertainty and anxiety is real. My question to congress is: When will you unchain my dreams?

When my only hope is taken away alongside DACA?

Or will you fight to protect students like me from deportation?

Alonso R. Reyna Rivarola ([NY Times](#))



I will always remember the day DACA was announced. It was June 15, 2012, and I was camping for a retreat with students, friends, and colleagues from the Mestizo Arts & Activism Collective (MAA), a youth participatory action research collective in Salt Lake City, UT.

At approximately 10:00 AM, the group took a break from the agenda, which I used to go back to the tent to check on my phone.

When I turned my phone back on, I was taken aback by the number of text messages, missed calls, and voicemails I was receiving (buzz-buzz; buzz-buzz; buzz-buzz...).

“The DREAM Act has passed! The DREAM Act has passed!” shouted a close friend of mine—a fellow DREAMer—in a voicemail. I was excited, yet confused by her words, knowing at the time that no DREAM Act bill was being debated in U.S. Congress. However, as confused as I was, I was too adrenalized at the possibility that a quiet DREAM Act boxcar bill had made its way into becoming a law.

After returning her call, we shared our feelings of excitement and confusion regarding the matter. Then she informed me President Obama would be making an announcement at any moment. As soon as I hung up, I read through a few more text messages, called my mom, and ran outside the tent to inform the MAA family about the news.

Within a few minutes, all MAA participants crammed ourselves into two cars in Little Cottonwood Canyon, where we tuned into the radio, eager to listen to President Obama announce the program which we have all come to know as Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

My story is one of hundreds of thousands of DACA stories across the United States. We all have different backgrounds, first and last names, interests, journeys, and goals; however, we all have at least one thing in common: we are all American Dreamers.

Since DACA, I have earned an honors B.S. in Sociology and M.Ed. in Educational Leadership and Policy from the University of Utah. I am an active community member and have most recently been honored to serve as the Dream Program Coordinator at the University of Utah, where I seek to support undocumented students, with and without DACA, to access, persist, and achieve a higher education in the country we all call home.

Fidencio Fifield-Perez ([NY Times](#))



A high school teacher told me, “People like you don’t go to college.” I was accepted to seven colleges after graduating with honors from Emsley A. Laney High School, and I now hold a BFA from Memphis College of Art as well as an MA and MFA from the University of Iowa.

In July 2012, I stood in front of the television with

tears rolling down my face as I heard Obama enact the controversial executive action after the DREAM Act, a bipartisan bill, failed to reach cloture in the Senate. Even through those tears, I knew that my life and the lives of so many others were at risk, and that most people would never see this.

I was the first of my family to graduate from high school. Every undocumented person I knew, other than my two younger brothers, dropped out because it was expected of them or because a high school diploma meant nothing for the jobs they applied to. I remember being told to get a job that paid under the table and to keep my head down. This was contrary to what my elementary and high school teachers had told me. “Work hard, and you too can make something of your life.” Of course, they were as unaware of my status as I was of the full repercussions that came with it.

DACA legally allowed me to drive and work without fear of deportation. I began showing my work nationally and internationally. I accepted a fellowship to pursue my Master’s. I taught seven undergraduate classes at the University of Iowa. I instructed and befriended your children; I was your partner. In 2015, I graduated with my Master’s and accepted a job at the National Museum of Mexican Art as an educator and art handler. I am now completing an eleven-month residency in Galveston, Texas.

Are these words enough for you to acknowledge my existence or my humanity? The moment I was smuggled into this country age seven, my body ceased to be my own. DREAMers’ bodies have been debated, regulated, rounded up, and biometrically measured under Obama’s Deferred Action. The stakes have risen with its potential repeal. We find ourselves repeating what we’ve done before, convincing you that we exist, while allowing you to ignore that our parents are the original dreamers.

Gladys Klamka, came to the U.S. at age 4 from Mexico ([NY Times](#))



Patience and heartache is how I would describe my past. I was two when my family made the most important decision for us. Moving to the US meant a second chance for me. If we had stayed in Mexico, my folks would have made a decision to give me up for adoption.

We settled in NJ for economic relief. Unfortunately, at the age of 4, my innocence was stolen from me. I was sexually molested by a 16-year-old boy, but my parents didn't report it because they didn't understand the law and feared deportation.

Both of my parents worked full-time to keep a roof over our heads. I wasn't able to go off to college financially, or drive, or travel. I got use to doors slamming in my face. I was about 14 when my parents explained to me about our status, confused about my future, I decided to push harder. I finished school, worked full-time, and gave back to the community. I received a tax payer ID issued by the IRS in 1997. I always thought it was funny that the government will take our money but not let us work legally in this country.

I applied for DACA in 2012. I still remembered the day I opened my approval letter, my father said, "Now I don't have to worry about you." I now own my own home and car, and I work in the healthcare system. After Election Day, I wonder if this dream will end soon. It's been a hard reality check that privileges could be taken away. I only hope that other young dreamers and undocumented children like myself make the leap to push that shut door open. To know a dream of wanting more is not impossible.

Maria, 35, came to the U.S. at age 4 from Guatemala ([The New Yorker](#))

Maria is a beneficiary of Deferred Access for Childhood Arrivals (*DACA*), the federal policy that granted hundreds of thousands of immigrants protection from deportation, which the Trump Administration has now moved to end. For the past twenty-one years, she has lived in Los Angeles. She now has sixteen months to figure out how to explain to her three young children that she, unlike them, is not a citizen. If and when the knock on the door comes, she wants her family to understand why it is being split apart.

Maria was four years old, in 1986, when her mother left their village of Guastatoya, tucked in the foothills of Guatemala's Sierra de las Minas range, in search of something better for her children. She paid a smuggler to bring her to America, and made her way to Los Angeles, where she found work as a live-in maid for a wealthy retired couple in Beverly Hills. She tidied up after them from Monday to Saturday for a hundred and fifty dollars a week, paid in cash. When her employer left for hair appointments, she would use the time to clean a neighbor's house for another forty dollars. On her free day, she called Maria. Every Sunday at 10 A.M., Maria would scamper to the only shop in the village with a telephone, buy a soda, and wait for her mother's call.

At the smugglers' rate of five thousand dollars per passage, it took Maria's mother a decade to save enough to bring each of her five children up from Guastatoya. Maria, the youngest, was sent for last. One Sunday, in 1996, when she was thirteen, her mother told her she was making arrangements for her passage. Maria cut a slit in her belt and wedged what little money she had inside, filled her school backpack with clothes, and set off with an older cousin who was also making the journey. She had never left her village before, and thought Los Angeles must be nearby—that it might take only a day or two to finally be reunited with her mom.

The journey took nearly a month. At the border between Guatemala and Mexico, Maria joined a group of twenty people, most of them from El Salvador and Honduras. When the sun set, their smugglers pointed to a mountain path and told them to start walking. On the other side, they were loaded into a box truck in two rows. Jugs of water were passed out—one for every three people—to help passengers cope with the sweltering heat. When the truck climbed or descended hills, its cargo tumbled around, humans piling painfully onto other humans. Just south of the American border, the doors were unlocked. One Salvadoran man leapt out and drank water from a puddle on the ground. Maria found a horse trough and refilled her jug.

Maria then walked across the border into the U.S., but the truck that was supposed to take her and her fellow-migrants to Los Angeles never arrived to meet them, and she was arrested by Border Patrol and sent back to Mexico. A few days later, when she crossed over a second time, the truck was waiting. The other migrants were loaded head to toe in the truck's bed, which was then covered with hard plastic. When the smugglers saw the blond-haired, blue-eyed Maria, they thought she could pass as a white girl, so she rode in the cab. She slept the rest of the way to Los Angeles.

When she finally saw her mother again, Maria couldn't believe how tall she was. "I came just to know what it was like to have a mom," she told me recently. "I wanted to be able to talk about personal things, have her teach me things. I wanted to *feel* that." She didn't understand anything about papers or her legal status. "If she had been in Brazil or Siberia, I would've gone there." Their reunion was not permanent. Just four years after Maria crossed, her mother was stricken with a debilitating osteoporosis. Without insurance, medical treatment would need to be paid up front, in cash, which was impossible. She decided to return to Guatemala to die. "I did what I was supposed to do, bringing you here," she told her children. She was proud.

By the time her mother left the U.S., Maria had herself become a mother. She had a baby girl and then two boys. She worked in the shadows to provide for them, but reported her income and paid taxes with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number. Lacking health insurance of her own, if a tooth hurt or she felt sick, she gritted through. When she got pulled over for a blown taillight and was unable to supply a driver's license, the L.A.P.D. impounded her vehicle and told her that she had thirty days to pay nine hundred dollars to spring it from the lot, or else it would be auctioned off. She paid the money and kept working. She had a frail grip on a stable life, but no matter what happened to her, she knew her kids, who had citizenship, would be better off.

In 2012, when the Obama Administration implemented the *DACA* policy, Maria rejoiced. She went in and let the government scan her fingerprints and take her picture. She sailed through the criminal background check. She hoped the program might one day lead to a green card. With her new work permit, she earned a Class-A commercial driver's license and became a long-haul truck driver. Carting California's produce allowed her to see America for the first time, at least its expressways and parking lots. She drove to towns in Massachusetts, New York, and Alabama, and brought her daughter along on a trip to Miami. She started earning enough to move her family to an apartment in what she thought was a nicer part of town.

Late one night in May, 2014, she heard glass breaking by her kitchen door. Her kids were asleep. She ran to the front door to find a man trying to force his way in, shouting “Where’s Carlos?” She opened the door a crack to try explaining that there was nobody named Carlos who lived there. Carlos emerged from a neighboring apartment just as the man struck Maria in the head with a telescoping steel baton. She managed to brace the door shut as they brawled in the hallway. Her daughter came in and screamed “Mom! You’re bleeding!” She reached up and felt that her hair was wet.

Maria got twelve staples in her scalp and helped an L.A.P.D. detective identify her assailant, who was arrested. “I did what I was supposed to do,” she said matter-of-factly. One of the detective’s informants told him that people were now looking for Maria, and he moved her and her children into a motel for several weeks, posting an unmarked L.A.P.D. squad car out front. She eventually moved in with her sister, until she could find an apartment on the other side of town. The detective gave her his card and offered his help if she ever needed it.

Truck driving was keeping her away from her family, so she started working as a nanny to friends of ours down the street, which is how we met. We knew her *DACA* status was due to expire in February of this year, but Donald Trump’s election brought new urgency to the paperwork. My wife, a lawyer by training, helped her fill out the forms, recording her responses to questions like “Are you *NOW* or have you *EVER* been a member of a gang?” With our newborn son in my arms, I peppered her with questions of my own: “When can we start sleep training?” “Should I be trimming his nails already?”

Her renewal petition was submitted in the final week of the Obama Administration. In February, Maria also applied for a U visa, a special status given to individuals who have assisted U.S. law enforcement. Though she had been eligible since 2014, she had *DACA* and didn’t think it was necessary. The detective was happy to provide the required “certification of helpfulness,” but, apart from a letter informing her that the government did not require fingerprints (as she had already provided them as a Dreamer), she has heard nothing. (There is a cap of ten thousand U visas issued each year, and a current backlog of more than a hundred and sixty thousand cases.)

Last week, after the Trump Administration announced that it was ending *DACA*, I asked Maria how it felt to know that her future is in the hands of Republicans in Congress. Normally chatty, she was momentarily flummoxed. “I don’t have any faith,” she finally admitted. “They don’t want us here. They only think about us in terms of jobs, not in terms of family. We have kids that were born and raised here.”

Her oldest daughter has just started as a freshman in college this month. She’s old enough to know about the threats encircling her mother, but Maria’s two sons, who are twelve and thirteen, don’t realize what is happening. They both think that she’s a citizen. If Maria is deported, she will have to take them to Guatemala with her, leaving her daughter here. “I’m not going to take her future to Guatemala,” she said. “She’s working. She pays her taxes, her Social Security, Medicare. She’s in school. How could I take that away? It’s not her responsibility to look after her little brothers if they take me away. I’ll have to make them go through it with me.”

The boys barely speak Spanish and have never been to Guatemala. “Could you go back into hiding?” I asked her. “No,” she said, firmly. “The government can find me easily. And without a work permit, I can’t even apply for a job at McDonald’s.” She didn’t yet know, however, how she would break all this to her sons. “They’re good students! They want to become doctors. They’re following their sister’s lead.”

Maria trusted the government when she applied for *DACA*, and didn’t think twice about helping the L.A.P.D. put a criminal behind bars. The U.S. government knows where she is, and her attacker, whom she believes is due to be released soon, will surely be looking for her. She’s taught her children never to open the front door unless someone slides a search warrant under the crack. She may not be a citizen but she knows her Fourth Amendment rights.

“There’s something about this country that wraps you up and doesn’t let you breathe, if you’re like us,” she sighed. “I play by the rules. A lot of things happened to me, but I don’t give up. I have until February of 2019 to be legal in this country. I know God is with me.”

Dan Lee, came to the U.S. from South Korea ([NPR](#))

Dan Lee rarely talks about his status as a DACA recipient. Apart from having close family and friend confidants, the secret of being in the country illegally has weighed heavily on Lee ever since he learned he didn't have the proper paperwork in high school while applying for a job.

In an interview with NPR's Michel Martin, Lee remembers being 15 and thinking "What is the point of me doing anything if I'm not going to be able to have a career or be able to, I guess, be 'normal'?"

Lee's parents brought him to the U.S. from South Korea in the hopes of giving him an American education. From what he can gather from his parents, they tried to pursue citizenship but ended up falling victim to an immigration scam.

Lee is part of about 20 percent of DACA recipients who came to the U.S. from Asia. South Koreans make up the majority of that demographic.

Because of DACA, Lee was able to get the documents needed to get a job and apply for school. Today he's a fourth-year political science student at American University in Washington D.C.

With news that President Trump has rescinded DACA with a six-month delay, he wanted to speak out.

"There are 800,000 people just like me," Lee says. "People who have full-time jobs, attending school. They are the types of immigrants you want in your country."

Interview Highlights

On why his immigration application didn't go through

My parents, they were scammed by a supposed immigration attorney and [they] didn't speak English. They didn't know how the American system worked. They didn't know the laws here and they just assumed, "Oh, if we hire an attorney, everything will work out." Turns out it didn't.

On his life before DACA was introduced

I see that Congress has tried to tackle immigration reform so many times and they've mostly failed over and over again and I realized that there's just simply no hope and I was going like, "What is the point of me even trying in school? What is the point of me doing anything if I'm not going to be able to have a career or be able to, I guess, be 'normal'?"

On waiting to learn the fate of DACA

It's like when you're on a chair and you lean a little too back and you're just about to fall, right? And it's like feeling that perpetual falling feeling. I just want to be able to know if I'm going to be able to keep what I built here. I want to be able to one day own a house, have a family, have a job and watch football on Sundays peacefully.

On challenging claims that DACA recipients are criminals and welfare babies

In order to receive DACA, you need to pass a criminal background check. Not only that, you have to pay money to apply for DACA. It's close to \$500, and compounding with the fact that you have to give your biometrics and the fact that you're not eligible for any sort of social benefit in the United State

Ms. Guzman, came to the U.S. from Mexico ([Fortune](#))



Ms. Guzman is a junior at the City University of New York (CUNY).

I arrived in the U.S concealed in darkness. I was 4 years old, unaware that my presence—and my parents’ yearning for a better life for me—constituted a crime.

Over the past 17 years that I have lived in the U.S., I have experienced an inner battle in trying to define who I am: American or Mexican. I’ve come to determine that I am both. The beautiful thing about this country is that one’s creed, race, or religion do not prohibit one from achieving the American dream through hard work and perseverance—or so I was told growing up.

My diplomas, awards, and years of growing up in the public school system are negated by the fact that my birth certificate does not reflect my American identity. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) for me was a way of coming up for air after having been underwater all my life in a sea of uncertainty. I was able to catch my breath, but I was not yet on a boat back to land. DACA allowed me to work legally, have a Social Security number, open a bank account, and have something as simple as a state ID. Most importantly, DACA provided me with a license to dream. When my younger brother was diagnosed with ADHD, I decided to pursue training in psychology and gather the clinical tools needed to help him and other children like him. With DACA, I was able to apply for scholarships based on my merit, which allowed me to be the first in my family to attend college and actually be able to pay for it.

This was my form of a lifejacket, but my future was still left behind floating in the vast sea. This temporary fix did not grant any legal status; it simply deferred my deportation. I willingly surrendered my personal information to the Department of Homeland Security, trusting the government would not use it against me. DACA recipients and undocumented folks pay taxes and contribute to programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security that we aren’t eligible for or get federal financial help from.

By the time DACA is phased out, I will have graduated with a double major in psychology and political science. But a repeal would leave me unable to utilize my degree. Without a valid work permit, I will not be able to help children like my brother who require speech and occupational therapy services. And yet, in the larger context, I am one of the lucky ones eligible for DACA.

Many focus on the 800,000 DACA recipients who are often admired for their resilience, ignoring the fact that we stand on the shoulders of our parents. We are called Dreamers, but our parents dreamed long before we did of a better future. There are 11 million undocumented people who deserve to be acknowledged as people. Comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship needs to be passed, without Dreamers being used as pawns for either party for their temporary political convenience. Nothing has been handed to us nor have we taken anything. We have earned what we have. We want to be understood, and demand what we deserve.

For now, we wake up to a reality filled with uncertainty, not knowing if in our pursuit of happiness, our mixed-status family will be separated. After all the class lectures I have sat through, the most important lesson I’ve learned, to persevere, was taught by my parents. I’ve watched them work multiple jobs, breaking their backs to put food on the table for my siblings and me. Because of this lesson, I have faced all obstacles thrown my way. When I fall, I stand up and do it all again the next day. The road to the American dream was supposed to be built on perseverance and hard work. But 17 years after that nighttime journey, that dream is now a prohibited one.