



TheDream.US is the nation's largest college access and success program for immigrant youth, serving over 4,000 current and former Scholars. By collaborating with partner universities and community colleges, TheDream.US provides scholarships to undocumented immigrant students who currently hold or are eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) or Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

We believe that all young people, regardless of where they were born, should have the opportunity to fulfill their potential, gain an education, and fully participate in the country that they call home.

Below you will find 94 stories of current and former Scholars who are making our communities and country stronger.

Our students exceed expectations in the classroom and in their campus communities, often while holding a job. They demonstrate rigor and aptitude, and prove to us and to their peers that they are changemakers – whose futures will impact all of our lives positively. They are doing fantastically well in everything that is under their control, demonstrating persistence, courage, resilience, strong academic performance, and high graduation rates.

There are thousands of DREAMers graduating from America's high schools each year. And many thousands more who are retiring from the America's workforce each year. It is in our shared interest as a nation of strength to support these young people in their quest for a college education. They are our shared future.

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Edder Diaz Martinez, Arizona State University

Degree: Journalism and Mass Communication

Hometown: Phoenix, Arizona

Age of arrival: 5 years old

Like most high school seniors, I took the SAT, applied to scholarships, filled out college applications, and was accepted into a program. Unlike most high school seniors, I then found out about my immigration status, and my world screeched to a halt.

A few months prior to my graduation from high school in 2007, Arizona legislators voted to enact HB2471, an amendment that described in-state tuition as a public benefit. The law declared undocumented youth as ineligible to receive in-state tuition, because it is unlawful for us to receive public benefit of any kind. Despite being raised in Arizona and contributing to the state I call home, I wasn't good enough. When I received my first college tuition bill, I realized how much my legal status affected my life. I was crushed. My education stagnated immediately after high school.

I didn't reenter a classroom until 2013. My mom sacrificed her entire life to see her sons graduate from college, so it became my life goal to obtain a Bachelor's degree in honor of my mom, who pressed on in the face of seemingly impenetrable odds. Now, I am proud to be a first-generation college student.

I've worked full-time my entire college career, but that doesn't stop me from being involved at school. I co-founded a student organization with the mission to educate, advocate and create community among undocumented students at Arizona State University. I am my fraternity's community service chair, coordinating volunteer work around the Phoenix area. I am also a part of Undergraduate Student Government Downtown as the elected Senator for the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Because of DACA, I own a car, I have a mortgage, and I have a steady job with benefits and a 401(k). I am able to have a social security card. I have the ability to work legally and pay taxes. I have a driver's license, and I can pay in-state tuition. DACA has allowed me to pursue my dreams, unencumbered. For this I am eternally grateful.

Higher education access for DREAMers is important for our society because it makes sense financially and is morally the right thing to do. Undocumented youth can contribute millions of dollars into the economy when we're brought out of the shadows and into the tax-paying mainstream. We want to start businesses, employ others, and begin to innovate and create new technologies that will help our shared country be competitive in various areas. Most DREAMers only really know this country, and, like everyone, we should have the chance for success.

Carlos Yanez, Arizona State University

Degree: Biomedical Sciences

Hometown: Arizona

Age of arrival: 5 years old

I imagine my story isn't that different from the other 800,000 DREAMers. When we first came, we felt isolated – we didn't know anyone, our family was back in Mexico, and we didn't speak English. My parents, fearful of deportation, told me and my sister not to talk to anyone about our immigration status – casting me further into the shadows.

But, as my memories of Mexico started to fade, America became my home. I used to have vivid memories of my life, my home, and my friends in Mexico, but they've been replaced by my memories here. This is where my friends and family are, and this is where my future is.

Aside from my parents' anxieties, my childhood was peaceful. My parents were lucky enough to find jobs and provide for us. They sheltered me and my sisters. I didn't realize until I was older how well-founded their fears were. At the time, Sheriff Arpaio was terrorizing our community and the Arizona legislature was passing a plethora of racist laws.

Since we came to the States, I knew that I was “sin papeles,” but I didn't know the weight of being undocumented. In high school, we started doing college prep work, and my friends started talking about where they wanted to go. They took college tours out of state and came back with stories of brick buildings with ivy and libraries with aged leather chairs to study in. My lack of a Social Security number, coupled with my parents' fear of me traveling, left me feeling barred from the future that I dreamed about. It was a rude awakening.

That wake-up call drove me into immigrant rights and social justice work. It makes my parents nervous - they're worried the police will arrest me for protesting and speaking out about how this system has failed so many of us. I realize the risk, especially now, but this is my home and I want to fight to stay here.

My activism started with an internship with the No Dream Deferred at the Center for Neighborhood Leadership, which focused on helping the community fill out DACA and TPS paperwork. I volunteered extensively with Mi Familia Vota, which is where I learned the ins and outs of citizenship and residency paperwork. Now, I pass that knowledge on during community forums to help neighbors fill out forms for free.

I also founded IDALI (Inmigrantes con derecho a la igualdad), which provides information and mentoring to undocumented underclassmen, so they have the resources to be able to go to college and succeed. Jorge Ramos submitted a video to our organization to encourage high schoolers to keep working on their papers, and we hosted a community forum at the local High School with booths from the Mexican consulate, Trans Queer Pueblo, Be a Leader, and Scholarships A-Z.

When I graduate, I hope to become a doctor and provide healthcare to undocumented immigrants. I know the difficulties of growing up without being able to see a doctor – it was too expensive and my undocumented family members don't qualify for government-assisted healthcare. I want to provide for my parents and for others, like my parents provided for me. Without education, I can't accomplish that goal.

The next stop in my journey is at Arizona State University, where I'm now studying. I remain committed protecting DREAMers and protecting our families. We must never become complacent or too afraid to share our voices and who we are.

Nancy, Arizona State University

Degree: Business Management

Hometown: Phoenix, AZ

Age of arrival: 4 years old

I still remember the day I got the email confirming my TheDream.US Scholarship. I was apprehensive to open it. Up to that point I had gotten numerous rejections and I was afraid this was going to be one more. When I read 'congratulations' I couldn't believe it. I stared in disbelief. Then tears filled my eyes. Being awarded this scholarship was life changing and I knew it meant that I would be able to accomplish my dream of graduating college.

Even now 2 years later, my eyes are filling up with tears writing this. It's a reminder that my hard work didn't go unnoticed, I didn't give up and I was able to do it. I cried then because I was excited for what was to come, and I cry now because I did it. I graduated with honors from Arizona State University.

My dream job would be get into finance to help people better manage their money. I know I've struggled financially in the past and I've found most families (especially in our communities) don't talk about money management. We are not educated enough on the topic and then just simply don't talk about it.

I realized I was undocumented from a very young age. I would overhear my parents having conversations about being us being undocumented and how they were worried something could happen. I never truly knew what it meant. I just knew we had to be extra cautious. When I turned 16, I finally understood what "not being from here" meant – I was in a country I called home, but I didn't have the paperwork to prove it.

DACA has helped me tremendously. I was so lost without it. I graduated high school with no clue how I would continue my education. I was afraid of telling anyone of my undocumented status because it could be risky for my family. I didn't know who to turn to. All the scholarships I found required citizenship. I couldn't legally get a job, so I didn't know how I would pay for school. It seemed like there was always a 'no', and everything seemed to be a dead end. When I got DACA, that all changed. Everything I couldn't do I was able to. I got a job, got my drivers license, went back to school, and overall, I felt like I was back on track. It gave me hope again.

However, the risk that Congress might not protect DREAMers fills me with uncertainty. Protecting DREAMers will benefit me, but I also care about it benefiting the country. Almost everyone I know that got DACA used it to go to school, get a job and strive for a better life. These actions contribute to a better society, stronger economy, and a more prosperous country.

To all potential TheDream.US Scholars I say, remember why you started and why you would like to finish. Enjoy the good and bad moments along the way. It is all part of the journey. Thank you to TheDream.US so much for helping me accomplish my dreams.

“Julia,” California State University-Long Beach

Degree: Civil Engineering
Hometown: South Gate, CA
Age of Arrival: 8 years old

TheDream.US is not just a scholarship award. It was also a powerful resource for me to stay informed about legal issues that involve DREAMers and an ongoing source of confidence that I could finish my college degree. Throughout my four years, I knew I was not alone; the people from Dream.US always stood right by my side. During uncertain times they always gave me encouraging words. They were like a family to me. TheDream.US has created an amazing community that I am so happy of being part of.

Thanks to TheDream.US, I was able to go to California State University and study Civil Engineering. I joined the American Society of Civil Engineers, won engineering awards, and joined my school’s surveying team – I was team captain and made some really nice friends. School was huge challenge – sometimes I used to stay up to 4 am working, but I enjoyed the challenge and knew that the hard work would one day pay off

This Fall, I will be starting my Masters Degree in Structural Engineering. With a Masters Degree, there’s a greater likelihood of having a project managing position in a company, which is my dream. I know I will be in a job where I wake up in the morning and look forward to going to work. It won’t even feel like a job because I will be paid for doing what I love.

My parents inspired me to work hard right from when I was a little girl, because I always felt guilty for how hard they worked to make things work for me. Working hard means that I will be able to go to college, find a job and one day provide for my family.

I was just 8 years old when I arrived in this country. At first, I had a very difficult time communicating at school. I felt frustrated not being able to understand English language. I also had a hard time completing my homework because no one at home understood English, so could not help me with it.

When we moved to the U.S., all my parents wanted to do was work. I remember we arrived on a Sunday and by Monday morning, my parents were already working in a jeans factory. They both worked long shifts so they could pay back the money they owed to make the trip here, but this meant I barely saw them. On the rare occasion I did see them, they reminded me that they are working such long hours because they love their children dearly and wanted to give us the best opportunity in America, so we could become ‘someone.’

When I think about the possibility that Congress may not protect DREAMers and those with TPS, it fills me with fear. But I know that instead of being fearful, we should all continue to be united, act and raise awareness on why it is so important. We should utilize the fact we live in a democratic society. DREAMers need to stand united and realize they are part of “We the People of United States.”

As DREAMers, we are not just willing to make this country prosper, many of the DREAMers have already started giving back to this country that has helped us obtain an education by maintaining a job with their professional career and at the same time volunteering in their community. We are not here to take away jobs. We are here to work all together to continue making this country prosper.

“Sam,” California State University: Long Beach

Degree: Criminal Justice

Hometown: Inglewood, California

Age of Arrival: 4 years old

I plan to major in Criminal Justice and minor in Forensic Science at California State University, Long Beach. Someday I may also get certified to become an EMT. If I lose my status, I will be devastated. I would be separated from my family and from my education- which I've worked extremely hard to earn- would just be thrown away.

It is extremely important for me to get my degree, not only because it'll prove that people like me aren't bad news, but also because it'll prove that we came here to better ourselves. However, if I do end up getting deported at some point, having that degree will help me establish a career. This is essential, especially where I'm from, because in order to eat in my country, you need to work; if you don't know how to do anything, you don't get very far in life.

I want to encourage people who don't support DACA to get to know us; we matter too, we may have the same wants, the same needs, we may even share some of the same dreams. They should listen and acknowledge the fact that some of us are working to help the US, to better ourselves and to better our families; we are working to become better people overall, we happen to come from different places, but we may be working to reach the same destination.

When I was four, I crossed the US-Mexico border for the first time. I was stopped almost immediately and taken into a room with other kids my age. The next morning, I was returned to my aunt in Mexico. We went to stay at a nearby hotel, where a man, who I later learned was my step-dad, came to visit and brought me a pink tracksuit. I wore it that same night when I tried to cross the border, again. I was put in a car with two men I had never seen before and we drove off.

When we got to the border, however, the car was stopped by border patrol. The men were arrested, and I was taken to the station. When we got there, I saw that it was cold and empty; I was so scared. A police woman approached me and asked for my name. I remember being told to never give my real name to anyone, so instead, I gave her the alias I had been told to give. She sat me down, took off my shoes and checked all my pockets. Then, she put my shoes back on, got up, and walked away.

Back then, I thought she was huge because she seemed so tall, but now that I think back, she probably wasn't that tall- I was just really short. I was so tired, I had to fight to keep my eyelids open. Suddenly, I felt someone wrap their arms around me and pick me up. It was the woman who had interviewed me earlier. I hadn't been informed about this part of the trip and I panicked. As she walked away with me in her arms, I yelled, kicked and tried to free myself. I distinctly remember her saying, "Okay, Okay", before she set me back down.

By then my eyes were wide open; I was no longer tired. My weariness was overcome by an intense fear which kept me awake, but not for long. I fell asleep for a few hours, and I woke up in a different place. It was a small apartment- white walls, a window in the far left; the only light in the room was coming from the ceiling, which was a sort of mustard color. There was a thin white lady with blonde hair on the floor near the door, playing with a little boy who was maybe 1 or 2 years old. She looked over and motioned for me to join her (later on in life, I learned she was a social worker).

I played with legos, which I had never seen before. Afterwards, she told me that my dad was coming to pick me up. I remember feeling confused and thinking to myself, I have never met my father and now he is going to come pick me up? Soon, there was a knock on the door. When she opened it, there was a Mexican man on the other side. He looked old and short. He had lots of gray hair on his beard and wore a red flannel shirt with a brownish jacket over it and dark colored pants. He gave the social worker a yellow envelope, and we got in his pick-up truck. I asked where we were going and he said he was going to take me to my mom. I was once again confused because my mom was in another country and as far as I was concerned, I was still in Mexico. Nevertheless, I ignored the thought and looked out of the window.

I assume it was dawn, because I remember the sky; it was covered in different shades of red, yellow and orange. In the distance you could see shades of purple and blue; it was absolutely beautiful. Sometime later, I must have fallen asleep, because when I woke up, the sky was a pretty light blue color, almost like the color of the sky at noon on a sunny day.

The man told me that we had arrived. He took off my seatbelt, and, as I got out, I saw my mom. For the first time in 3 days, I was able to breathe. She took my hand and took me into her car. Then, pulled out another mysterious yellow envelope and handed it to the old man. What I didn't know then, was that the hardest part was not over. In fact, it had just begun.

Like me, my mother is undocumented. She met my step-dad, who has a green card, a few years after she arrived. They then brought me to the US and, 8 years later, had my little sisters. My mother had only finished elementary school, and my step-dad dropped out in 9th grade. My siblings will be in fifth grade this fall, and I will be a first-generation college student.

I always thought that I might be undocumented. However, when my mom told me reality set in. I had asked her when I would be visiting my grandparents. She then explained that I would never be able to go back because I was undocumented. I didn't think much of it at the time, but it really hit me when my grandmother died. I wanted to go visit her - to see her one more time and to say goodbye - but I knew there was no way it was going to happen. Then, when my grandfather died, I took it even harder because at the time, I was waiting for a U-visa. It made me angry. I wanted to use the visa to go visit him. I figured if I couldn't make it to her, I'd make it to him...but I didn't. I was really disappointed, but in a way, it pushed me to work harder. I thought if I could grow up to become someone important, then maybe I'd magically find a way to go back to my old home and still be able to come back to my new home. To this day, that is not an option.

All in all, I had a horrible experience adjusting to life in America. I arrived here not knowing what a letter or a number was, much less how to speak the language itself. It made it really hard to make friends. I cried a lot and hated school. I wanted to stay home with my mom; that way, no one would tell me anything.

Unfortunately, that was not an option. Instead, I ended up in attending numerous schools in a short period of time, until I settled for one. It was at this elementary school where I made my first friend. A boy with light skin and Harry Potter glasses. He stood by me all through kindergarten, and it was thanks to him that I liked going to school a little more. I didn't, however, learn anything in that school. When I transferred to Felton Elementary School, my life changed. I met more people who looked like me and talked like me. It was a lot easier to make friends because there was no longer a language barrier. Soon, I started learning English. In third grade I reclassified and started getting straight A's. My mom and the rest of my family were all really proud. I've been earning excellent grades ever since.

After breaking the language barrier, education became very important to me and it still is today. I am now a very outgoing, social, and confident person. I'm actually glad I struggled, because in the end, it served as encouragement. It is thanks to my education and my struggle that I enjoy helping others and giving back to those who helped me.

I began to view America as home when my little twin sisters were born. I suddenly had a more important reason to stay here. Watching them grow up has pushed me to be a better person because they look up to me. Now, I work harder and always try to do the right thing. It is important for me to stay here in the US, not only to help them go farther than me, but because I can help my family more from here than from anywhere else. My life is here, even if my family is in two distinct countries.

Kristy Campos, California State University-San Bernardino

Degree: Sociology Major

Hometown: Ontario, California

Age of Arrival: 4 years old

Family has always played a central role in my life. My mother tells me that, in coming to America, her biggest sacrifice was leaving her own parents. A month after we left, my maternal grandfather died. It nearly broke my mom that she couldn't say her last goodbye. When we were younger, I didn't realize what she had given up. I was upset with both of my parents for making us leave our grandparents. But, I know now that thanks to my parents sacrifice, my sisters and I did not endure nearly half of what they experienced while they crossed the border, and for that I will forever remain grateful. Although I was awarded with the scholarship, I remained working my full-time job because I wanted to help out my family financially, especially my sisters. I wanted to provide them with a decent childhood and be an example that with hard work and dedication anything is possible. My sisters are my everything, so I will continue to fight for my goals and I hope they can look up to me one day.

I've worked really hard throughout my college journey, and I hope I can inspire others to go for their dreams and not let struggles bring you down. It breaks my heart to know that due to the lack of a piece of paper many DREAMERS are afraid to reach for their goals. The fear of deportation and financial struggles are stopping so many of us from thriving, but with sharing my story I hope to be an example that with determination, positivity, hope, and perseverance one can accomplish and overcome obstacles. My career goal is to become a counselor and to help those in need of guidance. I want to be able to impact someone's life and lead them to the right path for them just as The Dream US did for me.

For the many other DREAMers facing uncertainty, I urge them to keep their hopes high. Do not let fear stop you from taking the steps you want in order to excel in your college career. Demonstrate your abilities and your worth. You are doing this not only for yourself, but for your family and community. There will be tough days, and sometimes tougher days to deal with, but where there is a will there's a way. *El querer es poder y si quieres puedes.* Every single one of us have the ability to succeed, stay motivated, don't lose hope, and wake up every day grateful with a positive attitude.

Despite the looming uncertainty with DACA, I remain hopeful. I know it may be difficult, but I know with the support, there will be a way. We have not given up yet, and we won't any time soon. I plan to work extra hard this summer in hopes of saving some income for emergencies, and I plan to keep telling my story in hopes of change to occur. **AQUI SE RESPIRA LUCHA!**

We arrived on June 6, 2000 when I was four years old. My brave mother not only crossed the border while 9 months pregnant, but also gave birth to my younger sister just three days after arriving. Now, nineteen years later, in June 2019, my DACA-status is set to expire. DACA has provided me with the privilege of getting a work permit, a driver's licence, and a temporary relief of my status. DACA allowed me to pursue my higher education while simultaneously allowing me to provide not just for myself, but also for my family. Although DACA has not giving me citizenship, it has given me something far more powerful. It provided me with the ability to grow in a setting where it seemed that undocumented individuals could not strive for greatness, it gave me the ability to drive without fear, to work without any limits, and it has given me a community in which I know I am not alone, it has given me a state of temporary peace and relief.

College was the toughest journey I've encountered. I was the first to go to college in my family, and I had no one to seek help from. I spoke to my parents about going to college, and, although my dad was happy

to hear my dreams and aspirations, he told me, "I'm happy for you mija, but I'm telling you right now I will not be able to help you financially, and I actually need to ask you to get a job and help us with the rent."

While attending California State San Bernardino, I worked full time and was a full time student. It was extremely difficult, but I knew the sacrifices I had to make in order to get through college as well as to help my family out. I was constantly the first to leave my house as early as 4 am and the last to come home around 11pm. I dealt with stress, mental breakdowns, and always lacked sleep. There were times in which I would ask myself if it is all worth it and I was scared that It will all be taken away from me due to my citizenship status. Regardless of my fears, I kept pushing, overcoming all the stereotypes and obstacles that came my way.

The Dream.US has been a huge blessing in my life. Through the scholarship, I was able to work full-time to provide for my family while the scholarship aid me from school tuition expenses. I am the oldest of six daughters, and for the longest time I wanted to help my dad financially in order to provide more for my sisters and overall live a higher quality of life. This scholarship has allowed me to save up some of my income for my car, family emergencies, my own expenses, and overall save up for my master's program. Without this scholarship my journey would have been tougher and perhaps delayed, I thank the program with all my heart and I am forever grateful for such an opportunity.

My college education will continue to benefit me in numerous ways throughout my life. Already, it taught me that I am capable of whatever I set my mind to and that I can surpass any expectation or stereotype. As far as my career, it will benefit me because of the skills I've acquired and the lessons I have learned, especially the notion that we can accomplish way more than we think we can.

This scholarship has brightened the path for me and my family, and I am extremely grateful for the community it has introduced me to. I realised that I am not alone, that there are others that understand me and who do not look down upon me for lacking papers. NO HUMAN BEING IS ILLEGAL, I am and will constantly continue to fight for my goals, I've come this far and it is only the beginning. As a first generation, low-income, female, Mexican, and undocumented I am fighting every single day, and I am so proud of me. We are capable, we are strong, we are unafraid, we are DREAMERS!

“Yolanda,” California State University San Bernardino

Degree: Nutrition and Food Sciences

Hometown: San Bernardino, CA

Age of Arrival: 2 years old

Both of my parents are fighters. They immigrated to the United States with nothing but the hope that their children would have the opportunity to a better education and a better life. My parents didn't speak English and had very little education, but that didn't stop them from searching for jobs once they arrived in the United States. My siblings and I are currently authorized to work in the United States under DACA, but my parents remain undocumented. Seventeen years later, they continue to make sacrifices by working long hours and receiving low wages in order to help me and my siblings accomplish our dreams.

In their eyes, they have now succeeded beyond their expectations. My twenty-eight-year-old brother obtained his associate's degree in Business Administration and is currently on his way to becoming Assistant Manager at a major bank. He was the first in our family to attend college. My twenty-three-year-old sister attends California State University San Bernardino and will graduate with her bachelor's degree in Nursing - the first in our family to obtain a Bachelor degree. I am also enrolled at California State University San Bernardino, pursuing my Bachelor of Science in Nutrition and Food Sciences. Our opportunity for higher education makes my parents so proud, knowing that they arrived to the United States with nothing but the clothes on their backs and aspirations in their minds.

I am currently a junior at California State University San Bernardino and working towards a degree in Nutrition and Food Sciences. I wish to work in a hospital setting as a clinical dietitian before applying to graduate school to obtain my Master's degree in Nutrition and Dietetics. In the future I would also like to obtain certification to specialize with eating disorder patients. Along the road, I would love to incorporate my love of art with aspects of my career by writing and photographing my own recipes to publish in a plant-based cookbook. Additionally, I plan to give free demonstrations on how to cook healthy food for people with the most common medical conditions. I especially want to work on recipes that integrate parts of my Mexican heritage and show how delicious food can also be nutritious.

The road to where I am today has been everything but traditional. My father left Mexico before my mother and us in order to secure a living space for our family. I was only a few months old before he left for the United States, unaware that it would be over a year before I would see him again. Being separated from my father meant that my mother had to manage every expense on her own and that we had to find a way to stay strong until my dad secured a job, living space, and enough money to give our family a comfortable life. Two years later, my siblings and I crossed the Mexico-Arizona border without my mother. We stayed in Arizona with a family friend before arriving to our new home in Los Angeles, California and reuniting with our parents. When we arrived in California, we didn't receive a warm welcome from our relatives. They had little faith that we would be able to achieve our goals and offered minimal guidance. Our first home was a worn down garage in Lynwood, the garage door was smashed in and the cool air would circle the room, the fleas that infested the carpet would leave bite marks on our arms, but my parents knew that a bright future lay ahead.

I don't remember much about my early years, but one thing I know for sure was that there was a lot of tension and sadness in our house. My mother felt helpless in an English speaking country and constantly regretted her decision to leave Mexico. My mother and father's relationship was falling apart during this time. It wasn't until nearly five months after arriving that my siblings were enrolled in school and I in kindergarten. We didn't stay in Los Angeles for very long, the loud city was uncomfortable and

isolating for my family. Our uncle urged us to move to San Bernardino and showed us the hospitality and kindness that we had previously been neglected. My first day of elementary school was unforgettable and deeply upsetting. I was enrolled in a bilingual school, where I was bullied by other students and the teacher. I remember that she would purposely make me read aloud and would make several racist remarks towards my mother after school. We never filed a complaint in fear that the police would get involved and deport us. School began to get easier once I learned English and adapted to the American culture. By age seven, I was fluent in English and eventually had trouble picking up my Spanish again.

Despite our rough start, I have always seen America as my home. My whole life and all of my memories have been here and I don't know anything else.

I sometimes stop to think about how my life would have turned out if my parents' dreams would have failed. Without an education I think I would be doing what many women in our culture are taught to do. I imagine myself taking care of a household and married, or working part-time in a small tienda or restaurant owned by family and neighbors. While there is nothing wrong with this lifestyle, I have always wanted more for myself. I suppose I've inherited my parents' work ethic in that sense. I have always been determined to pursue higher education, even if it meant taking twice as long so that I could work simultaneously to pay for my degree. Luckily, my mom found TheDream.US over a popular Spanish newscast and immediately told me to apply. I never imagined that I would be granted the scholarship, but I am so glad that I was given this opportunity. My hope for other undocumented students is for us to always strive for our goals and work hard. Even though our journeys have not been easy, we are just as deserving as anyone else and we must strive to prove that

Paul Parrish, California State University San Bernardino

Degree: Mathematics

Hometown: Santa Ana, CA

Age of Arrival: 5 years old

For the last 21 years, my dad, a pastor by training, has worked any job he could find to support our family. He still struggles to make ends meet because he cannot be legally employed since he, like the rest of us, is undocumented.

We first came here as tourists from South Africa. My dad tried to find legal work and change our immigration status; the church at which he worked had made promises to him and didn't keep them. Our legal residency then expired, and times were consistently tough. One day in particular comes to mind when I think of the challenges we've faced as a family. One day, my dad cried as he broke open our piggy banks to pay for groceries for the week. It broke my heart, and I'll never forget it. We lived at the mercy and kindness of others for quite some time until my dad found steady work in Santa Ana, where I grew up.

I grew up in a dangerous neighborhood in Santa Ana. Even growing up in this often scary environment, though, I was never afraid of the local street gangs or school bullies or anyone like that. Instead, I was afraid of the police; I was afraid of La Migra; I was afraid of losing the place I call home.

Now my circumstances have changed, but new challenges have emerged. I now live in a community surrounded by a lot of people who hate the idea of immigration reform. They only appreciate me because they do not know I am undocumented. Being white and speaking English as my native language gives me a unique insight into pockets of deep-seeded racism in mainstream American culture. It is amazing how accepting people are when you look like one of their own, act like one of their own, speak like one of their own, but only upon revealing to them that you are undocumented do you find that those same people no longer treat you the same. My lack of papers should not mean that I don't belong here or don't deserve a chance.

Despite bumps in the road throughout my years in school, I have always dreamed of becoming a doctor and serving low-income populations. When I saw a sign advertising TheDream.US scholarship, I knew I had to apply. Now, at Cal State University, San Bernardino, I am studying math, and my favorite classes are math theory classes. After graduating, I plan to go to medical school.

I also have a job working at a Christian Camp as a maintenance worker, building, fixing, planning, and generally making things work for people. Thanks to the DACA program, I am able to work, and I hope that continues as I continue to chase my American Dream. DREAMers are among the most motivated, intelligent, and hardworking members of society; we strive for what our parents could not achieve.

My brother went back to South Africa -- a place neither of us have ever called home. He excelled in chemistry, physics, and mathematics here, and had very much, it seemed to me, carved out his own special place in American life. But, he was tired of being rejected and cast aside by the government and by people to whom he pledged his allegiance for over 20 years.

It was a very sad day when my brother left. My parents then placed their hopes on me for attaining the American Dream, and accomplishing what they had not been able to in their lives. This serves as my main motivation in life; I hope someday I can repay them for all that they have done for me, and I view my education as a means to do just that.

Star Hernandez, Mt. San Antonio College

Degree: Nursing

Hometown: California

Age of Arrival: 4 years old

I am a first-generation college student. I am a daughter. I am a teenage mother. I am undocumented.

When I was four, my mom brought me and my five siblings to the states to escape my abusive father. She worked three jobs to support us. There were days we wouldn't see her at all, as she spent them running from one job to another, working from 10am till 4am. She worked in a fast food restaurant, at a warehouse, and as a babysitter.

Still, it wasn't enough financially for us. We couldn't understand what was going on or how much she was sacrificing. My second-to-oldest brother begged for money, desperately trying to achieve the American teen image. My older sister became a teen mom and moved out faster than a blink of an eye. My oldest brother was deported.

My mom cried when the rent money didn't add up. At six years old, I felt hopeless and helpless.

Then, one year, a month before summer vacation, she lost all of her jobs. We spent the next year living on the streets until my grandmother found us.

When I was eleven, my teacher asked me to read in front of the class, and I couldn't. I stood in front of the class, staring down at the unfamiliar words, as fingers pointed at me and laughter echoed. I ran out of the class crying. My teacher came running after me. She told me not to be ashamed of my roots and that I was the same as everyone else. Then, she told me that I was undocumented.

Throughout middle school, I was bullied -- called an "alien;" told to go back to my own country. I felt unwanted and was suicidal. But, I kept my head held high and pushed forward.

During my sophomore year of high school, I learned to speak and read English properly. I joined clubs and teams - soccer; Best Buddies Club, which organizes dances for children with special needs and keeps them company; and the Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA), which raises money for kids with health problems. Through HOSA, I learned the power of action. I started attending cancer walks and donating to the homeless - both, now lifelong commitments.

I'd always known I'd wanted to attend college, but without TheDREAM.US scholarship I wouldn't be able to. Now, I know that school is the key to repaying my mother. College can be difficult, especially as a teen mom, but through this journey I've discovered my strength. When times get tough, I get up, dust the dirt off, and keep going. I will not give up.

For those that bullied me and pushed me down, I want to show them what an immigrant can accomplish. We must prove them wrong and show that we are here to make a better future for ourselves. My goal is to become a Midwife and become a role model for my daughter.

Mexico will forever be my home, but America is where I can succeed, excel, and provide for my family. I want to repay my mother and show her why she sacrificed so much for us to come here.

Roxana Amparo Ventura, San Francisco State University

Degree: Social Work/Journalism

Hometown: California

Age of Arrival: 2 years old

I want to make something of myself to inspire my little brother, and to make my parents proud when they see me in my cap and gown. Overall, I want my family to know the sacrifices they made have paid off. In order to do all of that, I need a college degree. I now have that chance thanks to TheDream.US.

TheDream.US provided me with the financial aid I needed to transfer to San Francisco State University. Here, I will continue my education as a social work major with a minor in journalism. My dream is to service with my community through social work and case management. Soon I will pursue a PhD, but for now I will work on earning my bachelor's degree and then my master's in social work. I deserve that opportunity, just as much as any citizen.

As a DACA recipient, my journey to higher education has not been easy, nor was it guaranteed. I was a junior in high school when I discovered that I was undocumented. One afternoon my friends and I had been working on college applications. When we were filing for FAFSA, I realized I needed a social security number...but I did not have one. In this moment, I felt my heartbreak and my dreams shatter.

Due to my documentation status, I was not eligible for any kind of federal financial aid. I was just as eager for college, as my two American-born best friends, but I thought that opportunity was stolen from me. When I arrived home that evening, I did my best to hold back my tears as I told my parents I could no longer go to college because it was too expensive. I felt ashamed.

I loved high school. I had amazing teachers that always inspired me to do my best work. I was on the school's leadership team. I also participated in the Puente program, a program that helped underrepresented populations transfer to college. I thought I would love college too. It never occurred to me that I would not start school the fall after my senior year, like all of my friends would.

In 2013, I began community college. I knew I had to continue my education, yet I was worried about how vulnerable I was because of my immigration status. My time in community college was challenging, but I remained resilient. I experienced family separation and faced homelessness, all while I served as editor-in-chief for my college's newspaper. It took some trial and error to determine my path to success, but, after 5 years of community college, I will finally be transferring and continue my education. I am thrilled TheDream.US has given me the chance to accomplish my dreams.

Kevin Gaytan, San Jose State University

Degree: Sociology & Dance

Hometown: San Jose, CA

Age of Arrival: 7 years old

Through the TheDream.US, I was given the gift of education, and I was able to study without fear. However, TheDream.US ultimately gave me something bigger than myself, which is the gift of helping others.

Education has changed my life, and my families' lives for the better, It has always been a sacred value in my family. As a college graduate I have seen the instant ramification of attending college. After receiving my degree, I have experienced an instant increase in income capacity. I have been able to reach professional development that is superior, fine-tuning my skills to a higher standard. But, most importantly, I'm making significant impacts in the lives of others through my newfound empowerment.

I'm now looking forward to moving on to higher forms of education. I aspire to earn a masters in sociology or political science. In addition, I am also planning on finishing a masters in dance. I look forward to working with my community, giving back, uplifting and empowering those like me. My dream job would entail one that allows me to make a tangible difference in the lives of immigrants, one that serves as a liaison for opportunity for those that don't have it.

I have always been oriented toward social justice issues, issues which involve community and resistance towards injustice. I became a Sociology major in order to understand the larger framework of our society. This became the catapult for me to activate spaces on campus where people could come together and hold dialogue and organize. Amongst these spaces were my own school clubs, rallies, professional development meetings, and more. I also have always been creative, and consider myself an artist - I double majored in Dance and was constantly dancing and creating art.

My experiences on and off campus during college also included the privilege of becoming part of the first "New Americans Fellowships" with the county of Santa Clara. This was a groundbreaking opportunity for DACA-mented folks to work in local government. Consequently, I was able to work with the Office of Immigrant Relations & The Office of LGBTQ Affairs in Santa Clara county. Now, I am currently a Community Worker for the Santa Clara County Office of LGBTQ Affairs.

When we came to America, in a matter of hours I was in a new country with a new language. As a result of this, I grew up with a cognizant understanding of my status as an immigrant. In addition to this, I have always lived with a community of undocumented immigrants. The understanding of our collective undocumented-ness made us a community. I always knew I was undocumented. In fact, by the time I got to college it was an identity I had taken ownership of.

Our communities are stronger together and Dreamers, and immigrants, are an asset to this nation. If DACA is terminated, I will continue working, continue educating myself and moving forward with all my plans. DACA is a foundational stepping stone, it does not define me. My work ethic and respect for others define my character. If DACA is terminated, my dreams will remain resilient.

Lizeth, Sonoma State University

Degree: Criminal Justice
Hometown: Fairfield, CA
Age of Arrival: 1 year old

I was about a year and two months when we came to America. I grew up just like all the other American kids, I never really felt left out or bullied for being born somewhere else. But I also was scared about our family's immigration status.

My parents have led hard lives. Both dropped out of school at young ages to work and support their families. They work in the heat of the fields during the summer, working 12 hours at a time to put food on Americans' tables. In the winter, they scramble to look for work.

In third grade we were taking a big state test and we had to put our information down for our test booklet. The teacher didn't want us to mess up, so she proceeded to read our information out loud for each of us and one of the questions was where we were born. She called everyone's names and everyone was born here until she got to mine. I was the only one that was not born in the U.S. After that, my classmates would make jokes and ask me if I had a green card. I went home and asked my mom what it meant and she explained to me. I was terrified, I thought that any moment now someone was going to come and take me away and take my parents away.

Now, I am a first-generation college student and I wish to set an example for my little brother, who is now entering high school. Higher education is the whole reason that the parents of us DREAMers left their country of origin behind and sacrificed so much. They left all their loved ones without knowing if they would ever see them again or without even knowing if they would make it here alive. Without higher education for us, it would be like all those sacrifices of our parents were for nothing. That motivates me.

Because we came from poverty, we know what it is like to struggle. Because we see our parents live day-to-day on a paycheck, we know why it is so important to take advantage of the opportunities America and higher education provide us.

Everyone has the right to an education and to make the most out of their potential.

Yatziry Galvan, Sonoma State University

Degree: Business Administration

Hometown: Napa, CA

Age of Arrival: 6 years old

Immigrants' stories are not always easy stories.

I remember it being very difficult to adjust to a new life here in the United States after I arrived at age six. I didn't speak the language and didn't have any friends. I didn't feel like I belonged and it took me a long time to convince myself that this is where I needed to be. I still miss my hometown, but I have come to realize that I am a mixture of two cultures and therefore will embrace both. I consider the United States a home because I have been here most of my life. I don't consider it my only home. I am a mixture of two cultures and I am thankful for both for having shaped me.

My family had to sacrifice a lot to be here. My parents had to miss several years of my life because they wanted to provide a better future for me. They missed a lot of happy memories that they will never get back. We all had to leave everything and everyone we knew back home. It was extremely difficult trying to maneuver our way around a new culture, with the idea that we didn't belong and knowing that we could be deported at any moment. My parents have always encouraged me to continue my education. They have always supported me in any way they could. My brothers have always been there to motivate me when I was feeling hopeless. I have always wanted to be the best possible role model for them.

My experience here in the United States has been a difficult one. Although it has been filled with happy memories, it has also been filled with terrible ones. I was bullied for not fitting in and not speaking fluent English. I missed out on a lot of great opportunities and experiences that my peers got to enjoy, but because I am undocumented I was not able to. I have always worked hard, but not always reaped the rewards. I continue to work hard every day and my scholarship is proof that hard work eventually pays off.

Through DACA, I have been able to get a steady job, get a drivers license and continue my education. After I graduate, I hope to join a non-profit organization and help my community in any way I can and by keeping people informed about resources and opportunities.

I believe undocumented immigrants are the most tenacious and hard-working people you will meet, because of the obstacles we've had to overcome. We will work twice as hard as everyone else because we know not to waste opportunities.

Adanari Gamez, University of California Santa Cruz

Hometown: Oakland, CA

Age of Arrival: 1 year old

We have struggled financially living and growing up in Oakland after coming from Mexico. But even though my parents may feel like they didn't give us the better life they would've wanted, due to our financial struggles, I think they did. Four out of the five of my sisters are first generation college students. We were able to get this far thanks to the hard work of my dad and the support of my mom. My dad always told us the importance of higher education, since he knows what it is like to not have it.

When I was little I was never aware of my immigration status. I thought I was just like everyone else. Until I got to my senior year in high school is when I started to become aware that I was undocumented and that I couldn't go to Mexico or travel anywhere outside the U.S. Even though I am undocumented, I never saw it as something to be ashamed of. I took pride in it because of the hard work of my parents and their sacrifices.

DACA has made it easier and more accessible for us to be able to make our parents proud. I am thankful to my parents and those programs that have helped me and continue to help me to achieve my goals and dreams.

I have a passion for art and I hope one day I can use my art to inspire and create change in the community. I want to use art to help youth find a way to heal and to express themselves and their concerns about the many struggles they go through.

Currently I am doing field study in Richmond, CA at an organization called RYSE Center. RYSE creates safe spaces for youth to transform, heal and love their communities. After graduation, I want to work to help youth affected by violence and to build better communities reduced of violence. I want to challenge the systems that target youth to become involved in the cycle of violence.

DREAMers have to work harder; we have to show society we want to be successful and we want to benefit everyone around us. I want to help youth and help them have the opportunity to receive a higher education. I want to work to serve my community and support my church community and to give back to my parents, who sacrificed so much for my sisters and me.

Elias, Colorado State University

Degree: Chemical and Biological Engineering and Biomedical Engineering

Hometown: Fort Lupton, CO

Age of Arrival: 6

When I graduated high school, I delivered the Salutatorian speech and encouraged my classmates to “always look up to the vast wide open sky, the possibilities are endless. You're not grounded, reach as far as you want. Make it your sky and fly.”

I still believe that.

Regardless of where you come from, your background should not keep you from obtaining your dreams, fulfilling your potential, and achieving your goals. This, I believe, will build a better and stronger future for everyone.

I am a first-generation college student. My parents and my two brothers are my biggest champions - they want to see me achieve and graduate college as the first in my family. My family knows the importance of finishing what we have started. Regardless of the difficulties that we face, or the fear we may have, we try to be persistent, to work hard, and to succeed.

My parents brought our family from Mexico to the U.S., because they wanted a safe place to raise their growing family. As a six-year-old, coming to the United States for the first time, I remember everything was different: the streets, the house, the neighbors, the food, the parks, the other kids ... even the Saturday morning cartoons.

I have always seen America as my home. It's the only place I know, the only place I have explored, the only place I've learned about in detail in history class. I grew up here, I made friendships here, and I have made a name for myself in my hometown of Fort Lupton, Colorado. My home. Teachers, instructors, neighbors and friends, and co-workers taught me to become the person I am today. I was molded by every one of the people that came into my life, each of them adding a different stroke of color into my life.

I learned I was undocumented in a particularly awful way, one that I will certainly remember for life. I was attending a Pre-Collegiate Development Program that was sponsored by the University of Colorado at Boulder. I had been part of the program since middle school, had taken special classes and programs, and had decided that I wanted to attend CU. I was accepted into the School of Arts and Science and was excited about my future. Then, I was taken out of a computer class, while in the program, to talk to an Admissions person. He asked if I had a Social Security number. It was then that I called my dad, asking for my number. My father then realized he could not keep my immigration status from me any longer. It was at that time that he told me and my world came crashing down. I was numb, confused, in a state of disbelief. I had worked hard to get to where I wanted. It was within reach and ... just like that, it had been taken.

I am now studying at Colorado State University and plan to be a dual major in Chemical and Biological Engineering and Biomedical Engineering. After successfully obtaining my degrees, I want to work in a lab researching viruses. My plan is to help communities, not only in America but also the world. I want to provide a voice to those who are scared and to our community that is in fear of what may happen tomorrow. I know that I can give back to my community by leading and setting an example.

It's good for everyone to have DREAMers flourishing and succeeding. Thanks to TheDream.US scholarship, I have the opportunity to get ahead and fulfill my potential. I wanted to be the first in my family to obtain a college education. I want to use my education to show my worth to the world.

My story is still being written, characters still being introduced, plots still being placed. No final details have been considered other than the continuation of my education. I do know that I want to make my parents proud of the child they raised and for whom they sacrificed so much. I am not going to stop.

Meliza Cardenas, Community College of Denver

Degree: Associates in Radiologic Technology

Hometown: Rifle, CO

Age of Arrival: 2 years old

From a young age, as I translated words and sentences from English into Spanish, I can remember strangers casting sideways glances and looks of shame - embarrassed for my parents that they had to use their child as a translator. But neither language barriers nor cultural differences stopped my parents from pursuing their dreams and providing the best opportunities for me and my siblings.

With only a high school education, my parents came to the United States 19 years ago in search of a better future for me and my sisters. They've worked tirelessly in hard, intense labor jobs and taught me the value of each dollar, and, most importantly, the value of family and love.

When we first arrived in the United States, I was only two years old. We lived in a two-bedroom trailer with three other families until we got on our feet. Every day, my mom would walk my older sister and I to school. Despite their hardships with English, they always put our education first. Through their dedication and hardwork, my older sister pursued an Associate's degree and is now a successful Medical Assistant. While she initially intended to pursue a nursing degree, her immigration status impeded that dream.

My senior year of high school, I enrolled in the DACA program. Now, I will be able to pursue my dream of becoming a radiologic technologist. I know that because I am not a citizen, I must work twice as hard to prove that undocumented people are better than we are perceived to be. I want my younger sister to be proud of her heritage and her family and to know that she has an incredible opportunity, as a citizen, to further her education and to make a positive contribution to our community.

My sisters and my parents have always been my best support system. To attend the radiology technician program, I had to move three hours away from home. It's been hard being so far from them, especially since my parents cannot visit often, due to their status. But, even with miles between us, they've continued to be my best support system.

They are my motivation to continue to fight for my dreams, no matter the obstacle. I want to have a career where I will be able to provide them with a comfortable life. DACA made this radiologic technology program a reality, and I hope to continue my education and become a Physician's Assistant.

Just like every other Dreamer, I want to make a difference in the world. We, the 800,000 DREAMers, are good people who want to make a positive contribution to the world, but we are limited by our immigration status. Our status should not dictate where we have the ability to make a positive impact in the world.

Joselin Castro, Metropolitan State University

Degree: Nursing

Hometown: Denver, CO

Age of Arrival: 7 years old

Knowing our roots is very important to my family. That is why, no matter where we go or how far we travel, we will never let go of some of the traditions we have carried along for many years now. My parents always talk to my sisters and I about where we came from. Although my sisters weren't born in Mexico like me, our parents passed down and instilled in us their experiences and life lessons about what it is like to grow up in a small town with little resources.

My parents did not make it past high school, which makes me a first-generation college student. Being the oldest of three sisters, I put a lot of pressure on myself to accomplish my goals. I know my two younger sisters are watching, and I hope I can set a good example for them, so they can someday follow in my footsteps.

Growing up in America has been very different than growing up in Mexico. I have enjoyed both experiences. Navigating school and social life can be challenging for any kid. But it's extra so if there is a language barrier. When I came to America at age 7, I felt overwhelmed in school and didn't speak the language. I would cry whenever my mom would drop me off. Of course, it got better.

Here in America I have had the privilege of being able to grow up with technology in school and just having more opportunities to thrive.

To me, my small town in Mexico will always be home. It's where I am from and it's where my family's values and traditions were formed. Although I don't consider the U.S to be my home, it is very important for me to stay here. America is where I have spent most of my life and it's where my sisters were born. It's also the place where I have more opportunity of reaching my goals and the place where my sisters can reach their goals and fulfill their potential.

Higher education for DREAMers is important: it helps us reach our goals, fulfill our dreams, and dispel stereotypes about immigrants. It removes fear and makes us feel that nothing is impossible.

I want to graduate from Metropolitan State University and become a nurse. As an immigrant, I have learned that it is very hard to be able to receive access to needed and affordable medical care. I would like to help those people who have suffered and made many sacrifice – people just like my family.

Sheila Galindo Vazquez, Metropolitan State University

Degree: Nursing

Hometown: Denver, CO

Age of Arrival: 4 years old

Since the first day we arrived, the United States has been my home. There's no question about it. This is where I live, where I work, where I go to school, where my family is, and where all my dreams and goals stand. While Mexico is where I was born, my story is here and will continue to be here.

When I was eight years old, I received a college scholarship from my elementary school. For every 'A' I received on my report card until graduation, I received \$50 for college. In order to receive the money, I had to open a bank account. This is when I found out that I was undocumented - without a Social Security number, I couldn't open a bank account. No bank account, no scholarship money. I was sad and confused -- I'd worked hard for the grant, and now the money was gone. I didn't yet understand the deeper complexities of citizenship, but I was learning the consequences.

When I was four, my parents brought me and my twin sister to the United States. Our parents left everything they knew - their families, jobs, and homes - and risked their lives to give us a shot at a better life in an unknown country with an unknown language. In the beginning, I was scared and confused, everything felt different. The separation from our extended family in Mexico and the language barrier were the hardest hurdles to overcome.

Surrounded by blonde hair and blue eyes, my darker features served as a megaphone for my accent. My sister and I were living in a different world than we'd ever known, and my parents kept warning us to keep a guard up. We were a low-income family, but, my parents made it seem like we were well adjusted, and we always had food on the table.

Quickly, we began to settle in and lead a happy life. I had great friends and influential teachers. My dad works in construction, and my mom runs the house and cares for our little brother, a U.S. citizen.

Our lives shifted again in high school, when everyone started to think about college. I did apply to colleges, but I knew I wouldn't be able to attend since I was undocumented. I knew my legal status made me different since I couldn't drive, or work, or travel like the rest of my peers were doing.

I received DACA in 2012 and it changed my life. I was able to come out of the shadows and be part of society. I'm able to work, go to school, drive, travel, and just contribute within my community. I arrived at MSU Denver in part because my twin was already attending there, and she raved about how much they help undocumented students. In addition to those resources, they have a great nursing program and the campus is only 30 minutes from our home.

No matter what happens, I plan on continuing to volunteer and give back. At university, I plan to join a club that advocates for undocumented students. I hope to help new scholars adjust to their first year at MSU Denver. After graduation, I plan to work in public health or as a school nurse and advocate for preventative health care within the Hispanic community. I want to be a role model for Hispanic girls and show them that this undocumented girl, who at times wanted to surrender, overcame the obstacles.

It's extremely important that I remain in the United States to accomplish these goals. I need to prove to myself and to the doubters that the undocumented population makes great impacts in daily life. Education

is my key to accomplishing these goals. If DACA is revoked I would be devastated, but it would not stop me from driving, going to school, and finding a new job.

Higher education is critical for all DREAMers, because we are an eager, education-hungry, innovative population. We need to expand our mind and we can be great assets to the world.

Teresa Cardona-Villa, Metropolitan State University

Degree: Business

Hometown: Fountain, CO

Age of Arrival: 3 years old

No matter where you are from or what culture you were raised in, it's true that parents want the best for their children.

That's certainly the case for my family. My parents brought me to the United States when I was only three years old in hopes of creating a better life for my siblings and me. In hopes of allowing us to reach our full potential.

Both of my parents were born and raised in Jalisco, Mexico, in a poor community that is full of kind and caring people, but that did not offer many opportunities. Both of my parents have lived very tough lives without access to education past the elementary school level.

My parents' sacrifices on our behalf made me realize that I cannot take the opportunity of education for granted. My father always said "education is the most important thing in life." It's true.

Like every single immigrant in this country, my family has come here to try and live the American Dream. My family came from Jalisco, Mexico, but I call my community of Fountain, Colorado my home. Yes, I was born thousands of miles away from it, and no I have not lived there all my life. But Fountain is where I have grown to be the person I am today. It's where my classmates, our family friends, and my teachers helped shape my life.

I plan to major in Business at Metropolitan State University and, maybe, one day will open my own business.

My story and my success will be because of my family's sacrifices and because of the relationships and support from my community here in America.

“Giselle,” Metropolitan State University

Degree: Undeclared, possibly Linguistics

Hometown : Denver, CO

Age of Arrival: 7 years old

The U.S. and El Salvador are both my home. The U.S. is my home, but at the same time it isn't. It is my home in that it's where I grew up. It is where I became who I am right now, and it'll continue to shape me and my future. But, I don't have all of my family growing up around me. For that reason, when asked where I'm from, the answer will always be El Salvador.

I have family living here in the U.S. and that makes it home. I have family living in El Salvador and that makes it home. I've read stories about people deported back to El Salvador, but they have not been welcomed with open arms. To be rejected like that from your country of origin is heartbreaking. I know that I cannot obtain the future I dream of in El Salvador. Both these places are home, but the U.S. is the only place for me to grow economically, socially, and academically.

When we left El Salvador, we left a lot behind. My mom owned a beautiful store, stocked high with a wide variety of foods. She gave it to my grandmother. We were building a house for my family -- a home for me, my parents, and my sister. It wasn't quite finished when we left. Now, another family lives in the house meant for us. We have family members whom I've never met. My dad left first, right after my first birthday. He didn't get to see my sister, Monica, born. We left a lot behind.

I always knew that I was undocumented -- it was never really a secret in our family. My parents didn't bring up our status publicly, and I'm glad. I think it would have made me more timid. I always played outside with other kids and didn't worry about my status. I was very open about being undocumented, and I was never afraid to say that I was. It was never a secret between me and my friends.

My parents warned me that, because of my status, I couldn't do all of the things that I wanted to do but that reality didn't sink in until high school. In 10th grade, I began researching college options for undocumented students. I learned that the Governor had signed legislation granting in-state tuition for undocumented students. That was the first glimmer of hope. Many of the scholarships I researched required applicants to be a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident. My hope and dreams grew when I found TheDream.US scholarship and the Hispanic Scholarship Fund.

I haven't yet declared my major at Metropolitan State, but I have an interest in Linguistics. My goal is to serve as a translator and provide comfort for people who don't speak English. Recently, I've been helping our upstairs neighbors, who are struggling with their registration. In the future, I hope to return to my elementary school and help parents and students there. I don't want to stop at a bachelor's degree, but instead want to continue on to obtain my master's and doctorate's. I want to continue my education once I am financially stable.

I'm afraid those opportunities and hopes will disappear without DACA. The program has been good for our country -- it has allowed many to find jobs, get their driver's license, and contribute to our shared nation. People need to be able to work, to go to school, and to improve their families' lives. The DACA program also helps psychologically -- it reduced DREAMers' anxieties and allows us to pursue our dreams uninhibited.

Abby Diallo, Eastern Connecticut State University

Degree: Biology

Hometown: Fairburn, GA

Age of Arrival: 5 years old

I was just five years old when we arrived from Mali to America. When we first came here, a lot of elementary schools would not accept me as a student because I did not know English. I could not understand anyone, and it was really difficult. I'm a fast learner, though, and I adjusted quickly and picked up the language. Of course, being an African student made me a lot different from everyone else, but it has always made me feel special rather than alienated.

After learning English, things got a lot easier. In no time, I was calling America my home. Growing up, I wasn't always the most popular person in school, but, for the most part, I liked that. I only have a few friends -- but they are supportive and accepting friends -- and I'd much prefer that over having more. In the classroom, I have always excelled and have been consistently placed in advanced classes throughout my education.

DREAMers are restricted access to higher education simply because we are not from here, but it seems to me that we actually have the capacity to make a unique, massive, and positive impact on society. We come from all over the world and have experiences and knowledge that a lot of people do not. We have different cultures and ideas and those ideas are exactly what is needed to diversify situations, which - to me - leads to shared success in this country.

As for me, I didn't fully comprehend the magnitude of being undocumented until my senior year of high school, when I began applying to colleges. Growing up, my mother always told me I didn't have "papers" and I didn't really think much of it. Things got a bit scarier when I started thinking about my future; I quickly realized the seriousness of my situation and that my spot in America wasn't set in stone.

I got DACA in 2014, which put me at ease for awhile. I try to only think positive thoughts and live day by day. Living in fear is a reality for most immigrants, but I believe I can start to change the narrative by working hard, remaining focused, and staying positive. I want to help other immigrants and people in general by being a living example, as well as through pursuing a career in medicine as an obstetrician.

This mindset has helped me get to where I am today -- a proud member of the Eastern Connecticut State University of the Class of 2020. TheDream.US scholarship gave me the security I needed to make college a reality. At Eastern, I am on the executive board for a new club that was created for undocumented students, which gives me the opportunity to immerse myself in changing the narrative for undocumented peers and people in this country. I also work part-time in the payroll office and I love working there.

College has helped me learn a more about myself and what I am passionate about. I have made many new friends with different personalities and perspectives on life. My experience so far has prompted me to think more about DREAMers and the amount we have to offer to society. Our college community has changed a lot this year because of DREAMers. And I am so grateful to be a part of that shift in ideology, diversity, and tolerance.

Areli, Eastern Connecticut State University

Degree: Psychology

Hometown: Waukesha Wisconsin

I always say I am from Wisconsin even though I was born in Mexico, because Wisconsin feels like home to me. The Dream.US scholarship has given me a chance to chase my goals, like any other kid from Wisconsin.

This is also possible for me because I received DACA in 2015, allowing me to become “DACAmended” and work and study in this country without fear of deportation. DACA recipients everywhere are only trying to achieve the American Dream. We are not all going to be neurosurgeons or electrical engineers; we just want to contribute and fit into this society. We, as immigrants, have hope and faith in this country. We are not perfect, but we have a lot to offer to this country.

In many ways, I had it much easier than a lot of immigrants in this country. I already had family living in the States before I came here, and my mother, though single, had a steady flow of income when we moved. I was also so young when I moved, that I had not yet made the lifelong relationships that come with age. Thankfully without those, I was not subject to the heartbreaking separation faced by many.

This is not to say my transition here was totally seamless or easy, and a significant challenge that I will never forget came in middle school when our teachers began to talk to us about the importance of going to college. Naturally, as an engaged student and driven person, I got excited by all this chatter and decided to take initiative to start looking into scholarships. To my dismay, nearly every scholarship I looked into required a Social Security number. I didn’t even know what a Social Security number was at the time, but I knew I did not have one. I asked my mom about it and my mom heartbreakingly explained to me why I did not have one: my immigration status.

I remember feeling, at this moment, like I had taken one step forward and two steps back in life. I developed this sense of inferiority relative to my peers because I was undocumented. Since then, I’ve been battling self-doubt and feelings of anxiety. For a while, I second guessed myself and viewed myself as less competent as the person sitting next to me. Today, I am more aware of where these feelings stem from, and I’m able to manage my anxiety levels, but it is still a day to day challenge I face as an undocumented immigrant.

My experiences with these confusing and scary emotions give me a tremendous sense of empathy for people who are going through similar challenges. In high school, I was a part of a group called Girl Talk, a group centered around the principle of empowering, educating, motivating, and inspiring young women of our school and town to become aware of how they can impact their surroundings by becoming involved in community service. This was such a meaning-making and positive experience for me that I hope to continue to give back to my community in a capacity that highlights the importance and benefits of maintaining and prioritizing mental health.

I think this emphasis on mental health will be important as I continue my education at Eastern Connecticut State University and inevitably face a challenging, stressful time during the course of my studies. However, I would say to anyone who is listening: sometimes the ones who grew up with scarce resources end up being the ones who appreciate and take full advantage of the opportunities given to them because they know how hard things can be when given very little. I plan to confront any challenges or difficult times during my college education head-on, and continue to set big goals for myself.

TheDream.US scholarship has enabled me to focus on my future with less anxiety and more hope that I can successfully contribute to this country in the way I want to. I have told my immigration story to many people. Some don't understand; others simply won't understand. I hope by sharing this story, I can get a few more to see the world through the eyes of a DACAmented student and TheDream.US scholarship recipient.

Jafet, Eastern Connecticut State University

Degree: Computer Science

Hometown: Durham, NC

Age of Arrival: 6 years old

One day I asked my father, "What would you do if you won the lottery?"

He simply answered, "Go back to school."

My mother and father were both born in the town of Pahuatlán, Puebla and experienced the hardships of poverty and starvation. My father had the opportunity to finish high school. My mother wishes she could have done the same, but she only made it to middle school.

While both were driven towards higher education, money prevented them from accomplishing their goals. My father is very curious about how things work - the mechanisms behind them. He is constantly learning, though he didn't receive a college education. My mom, who is also committed to learning, worked as a teacher's servant in exchange for free night classes at a teacher's house and a free place to stay. The living conditions became unbearable, and she quit and returned home -- her ambitions crushed.

I have the opportunity to achieve higher education and I want to make sure I fulfill my potential and reward my parents' sacrifice.

Adjusting to life here was hard. In Mexico, we had walked everywhere we needed to go. In North Carolina, we needed cars to get anywhere. In the beginning, I was frequently frustrated -- I couldn't communicate with anyone, my clothes were different. I had to accept that I was different.

My sister is one year older than me and is currently studying in community college. We always talk about how later on in life, we're always going to have each other's backs just as we do now. She has her own ambitions of opening up a business and taking care of my parents when we get older. That's something we both share. She has even outlined a plan for how we can both save money, so that our younger brother won't have to worry about paying for college.

We want to give our brother everything our parents wish that they could've given to us. While they may not be able to give us everything we wanted, they gave us everything we needed -- and that is more than enough.

DACA has opened the doors to my future, including TheDream.US scholarship, that will go towards giving my family, my community, and myself a better future.

Right now, I'm working to help as many people as I can. I have a passion for programming and multiple ideas for websites to help the Hispanic community. Currently, I'm working on designing a website for my mother's food business. Similarly, my uncles have their own companies, but they lack a crucial marketing tool: a website. I believe that by helping them, I can create more jobs for the community. After college, I hope to introduce minorities to technology careers like the one I aim to obtain. I have cousins who just began high school, and they've both asked me to be their mentor. Honored, I accepted without hesitation. In the future, I want to work as a software developer or maybe open a business in the technology industry to create more jobs.

Without college, and without DACA and TheDream.US scholarship, I'd be working in construction with my father, afraid to leave my house -- living in constant fear and frustration about not being able to do the simple things that others take for granted, including traveling, driving, or applying to college.

Now, I hope to graduate with my degree in computer science and continue my education by obtaining a PhD. And I want to give back to my parents for all they sacrificed to help me to be where I am.

Jorge Cabrera, Eastern Connecticut State University

Degree: Computer Science

Hometown: Greensboro, NC

Age of Arrival: 6 years old

When I was six, I journeyed 2,000 miles from Mexico to Greensboro, NC, where my dad was already living. Consumed in a new world with a different language, my parents sacrificed their ties to what they deemed familiar, to give my two younger siblings and me a brighter future.

I grew up in Greensboro, and it's the only home I really remember. When I started elementary school, I had difficulty learning the language. I was not able to go to the bathroom, because I did not know how to ask. Yet, as I began to get the hang of English and comprehend what was going on around me, I began to gain confidence.

I even joined a Little League baseball team. Despite working constantly to provide for and my siblings, my parents did not miss a single game. My coaches and teachers played a big role in keeping me on the right path. My baseball and soccer coaches instilled in me great work ethic and perseverance, and my teachers inspired me to continue learning and motivated me to continue my education. Although my coaches and teachers were there for me, my biggest support system has always been my parents. They have supported me every step of the way and sacrificed everything for my siblings and me.

While I always knew that we were undocumented, I started to see the struggles endured by the undocumented community, as I got older. I served as the unofficial translator in my family for any important tasks my parents had to complete. In high school, I learned that I was ineligible for a driver's license, because I didn't have a social security number. All of my classmates and friends began driving, but I could not. As small as it may seem, it was demoralizing.

Eventually, I started applying to colleges and faced conversation after conversation during which people told me I couldn't attend a university, despite my strong academic record, because of my status. I realized just how many doors my status would close for me, and it was a devastating feeling.

Thanks to the array of wonderful scholarships, including TheDream.US scholarship, I was fortunate enough to finish my Associate's Degree in web development. Without these scholarships, I would have likely had to sacrifice my goal of higher education. Now, I have many friends who are in similar situations and are unable to stay in school.

These friends, fellow Dreamers, want to contribute back to our shared country, as well as higher education for Dreamers creates a level playing field. Our community can only grow from those who pave the way. If more and more people from our community become lawyers, engineers, doctors, it creates change. Throughout my life, fellow Dreamers and DACA-students have encouraged me to never stop aiming higher.

After graduating from Eastern Connecticut State University, I plan to volunteer as much as possible for organizations that make a difference in the lives of undocumented students. I also hope to create my own organization that helps LatinX students get into the tech industry. As a computer science major, I see how the tech industry lacks diversity and would love to bring more Latinx students into the field.

My career aspiration is to become a computer science engineer to solve the issues our communities face every day. After getting my foot in the door of the tech industry and building my network, I want to start

a non-profit organization to help minority students get into technology. I want to ensure that Dreamers have access to better resources that will allow them to find mentors and scholarships to continue their education. My own experiences have inspired me to help others in similar situations.

Remaining in the United States is crucial to these goals. The fact that I am able to go to college and continue my education is proof enough. There are so many people that want to see me and others succeed. I aim to give back to my parents and community for supporting my dreams and giving me the tools to continue my career.

I hope that other current and future Dream.US scholars know that there are people who want us to succeed -- we just have to keep working hard and not be afraid to seek help.

Natalia Lozano, Eastern Connecticut State University

Degree: Business Administration

Hometown: Concord, NC

Age of Arrival: 4 years old

After we arrived from Colombia, my parents - like many immigrants - quickly realized it was going to take a lot more than just a hard work ethic to be successful here.

Both of my parents attended college in Colombia and later worked at banks there. They viewed America as an opportunity to chase what everyone calls the “American Dream” - and build on their careers. I always overhear my parents saying to each other: “I would have never thought I would be doing this to support my family.” Although their current positions working for hotel banquets and functions put food on the table, as I’ve gotten older I have understood how hard this is for them -- to go from being successful and stable in Colombia to struggling to prove themselves in the United States. I saw the light drain from their eyes as they desperately tried to commit to work for which they felt over-qualified, and I also saw how it strained their relationship.

All in pursuit of opportunity and future for their family.

As a young girl back in Colombia, I remember being very optimistic about my family’s upcoming move to the United States. At four years old, I was teaching myself some phrases and common words I might need to know for my new life in the United States. When we arrived in America, I realized right away that while the language barrier might not be a problem for me, it was going to be difficult for my parents. At my first day of preschool, I felt defeated and like I would never learn the language or keep up with my classmates. This feeling of inferiority dissipated quickly though, and I found myself absorbing almost every word. Before I knew it, I was almost as fluent in English as I was in Spanish.

I looked forward to going to elementary school every day. It was a place where I could continue to work on my English skills and where I could spend time with my friends. I didn’t have any friends in my apartment complex, so I was always excited to be around friends at school. But being in an immigrant family was often lonely. My parents used to work on holidays, and so my brother and I spent most holidays together since we had them off from school. I didn’t fault my parents for working holidays -- they sacrificed a lot to support me and both of their work ethics have set such a positive example for me throughout my life. Still, my brother and I missed them, realizing then, that our family was not like the “normal” American family. Because we weren’t. I wished our lives could have included more quality time together and have been a little less hectic.

As I got older, the strain on my parents’ relationship, the realities of being undocumented, and possibly not being able to further my education after high school become more clear to me. I would channel all my energy onto the soccer field; it was my outlet for all negative feelings. Unfortunately, this meant I kept things bottled up and didn’t talk to anyone about my feelings and concerns. I felt and was discouraged by everything. I had a sense of uncertainty and homesick for a place I was not even sure existed. I felt like I did not have a place anywhere.

Eventually, though, it became too much to hold in and I opened up to my parents. They explained to me that being undocumented should not be something that should hold me back -- instead, they said, it should be my motivation to push myself to be the best I can be, or better. The word “undocumented” has a negative connotation which even today remains a source of self-doubt and anxiety for me.

Yet being undocumented has also led me to amazing opportunities such as the Opportunity Scholarship through TheDream.US. This kind of support has not only been a huge confidence builder and means for me to access knowledge, but it also provides me a shot at molding myself into someone who is able to motivate others who, like me, struggle with these feelings related to being an undocumented immigrant.

As a student at the Eastern Connecticut State University, majoring in Sociology and Criminology, I can work towards these goals and, like my parents tell me, be the best I can be (or better!).

I am undocumented and I am unafraid.

“Juan,” Baruch College

Degree: Marketing

Hometown: Inwood, NY

Age of Arrival: 1.5 years old

Thanks to TheDream.US scholarship, I am excited and proud to say I'm enrolled as a student at Baruch College in New York, where I hope to study marketing. I want to work for a company that not only does marketing for goods and services, but also has some kind of social impact mission. What is the purpose of being human if you cannot find a way to make a difference?

Like most people, my family members are those who have made most of the difference in my life. Their support and their sacrifice has meant everything. I came to America from Guatemala when I was one and a half years old, and I celebrated my second birthday here. America, then, is the only country I've intimately known, and it has always been home to me. Guatemala is where my ancestors and where parts of my culture originated.

Since I was so young when I moved here, I don't remember much about the adjustment. I do remember struggling a bit in school in 1st grade learning to read, because we spoke two languages at home -- Spanish and English -- so I felt different from the other kids. My family had different traditions than other families and households, and that was also hard at times. My older siblings were Americanized but my parents weren't. It was a melting of two different cultures in my household. When I was young, that made me feel a little out of place, because I didn't know how to identify myself. For the most part, though, growing up wasn't too bad. My family wasn't wealthy by any means, but I had everything I needed. I attended school like everyone else.

My first fond childhood memories are from Queens, New York. I was lucky enough to have a mother who loved to cook, so Guatemalan food will always make me feel connected to my birthplace. Although, the only things I even know about Guatemala are stories from my mother's upbringing and her adventures. I have researched the Guatemala's demographic and its history, but my heart and soul are in New York, it's the state that raised me.

Even though I was fortunate to grow up in a place like Long Island and call it home, I definitely did not feel like I had equal access to educational opportunities, compared to my friends and peers. In high school, I didn't eagerly or aggressively pursue ambitious tracks, including college planning, simply because I didn't feel like any of them would be possible for me. Looking back, I wish I approached some of this differently, but it is hard when you lack papers: you don't feel as deserving as other kids. You feel ashamed for your life as if you did something wrong, I remember my guidance counselor asked me why I hadn't applied for college during my senior year of high school. I was embarrassed to tell him in the truth, I felt that I may get in trouble. I didn't have the most well-formulated answer for him; I just felt defeated.

Even though I felt limited in my opportunities for some time, I still completed my Associate's degree at a community college in my county. It is one of the best in the country, actually. I had to pay out of pocket; I didn't know about this scholarship program at the time. It was an incredibly difficult journey financially for my family, but it unequivocally proved to me that hard work pays off. I am the first in my family to graduate with any type of college degree.

After graduating with my Associate's degree, I knew that pursuing my Bachelor's degree was important to me. However, I could not fathom how I was going to afford going back to college, and so I began to

tell myself that my Associate's degree would have to be enough. Deep down, though, I knew there had to be a way. I desperately wanted my Bachelor's, and I think I was willing to do anything. I had grown up a lot from my high school years, and I was determined to let go of any self-doubt and make it happen. I found that there is always someone willing to lend a hand, when I met a past recipient from the The Dream.US Scholarship, and she informed me about the possibility. I knew I had to give myself the chance to pursue my goal.

Now as a student at Baruch College, I want to get involved in activities that I shied away from in high school. It feels like a second chance for me. I have a different mindset now, and a renewed determination. This scholarship has given me stability and confidence to purposefully work towards realizing my dreams. This scholarship has taught me in no doubt that kindness goes a long way and can change someone's life, in big or small ways. I plan on doing exactly that with my accomplishments to show everyone that an immigrant like me can rise against negativity and prove that we as humans in this country matter. This country was created on immigrants, and I will prove once again that can be the case. It's up to this generation of immigrants to show our value. We contribute to an ever-changing society, and, in many ways, are the historical backbone of this country.

Being a DACAmented immigrant has given me the opportunity to work like a normal person. I get to pay my taxes . It makes me feel happy to know that I'm doing what I'm supposed to. I work and pay my bills. And working has made me responsible and has again showed me the ability to take charge of my own life. I am finally being recognized as a part of this country and I almost feel complete.

Marvin, Baruch College

Hometown: Brentwood, NY

Degree: International Business

Age of Arrival: 7 years old

No kid should be made to feel that there are limits on what they can do. Yet after I found out I was undocumented, that's how I initially felt.

TheDream.US Scholarship and DACA allow people like me to grow and show what we're capable of doing. Through DACA, I have been able to work, get a driver's license, and be employed - just like all my other friends. It's as close as I can get to being a citizen at the moment.

I come from a mixed-status family of six and arrived in the U.S. at age seven. I am the first one in my family to graduate high school and will be the first to graduate from college. I have two younger brothers and one little sister; one of my siblings came with me from El Salvador and the other two were born in America. Both my parents are undocumented, working minimum wage jobs while raising a family. My father works in a deli and my mom cleans homes for a living.

Adjusting to the customs here in the U.S. wasn't very difficult for me - I always have had an open mind and am eager to learn. I was intrigued by the way of living here, so I made it my goal to assimilate quickly. Learning English was one of the hardest tasks, but after some setbacks, I took the initiative to succeed in the language.

I was busy in high school. I volunteered at our local church on the weekends. When the school held events I made sure to be there either representing a club or just by myself. I donated blood. I even took officer positions, including being the treasurer of the French Honor Society. But my favorite role was as a mentor in our schools first Generation Success Program, where I was able to help other students learn about success in high school and college, in addition to showing them steps towards getting into the right school.

Giving back to my community is both a short and long-term goal of mine. I want to help my community progress in many ways, including by making sure people know their rights and are educated enough to be able to reach their goals and dreams. At the moment, I will continue to mentor students in my community. I want them to understand that they are capable of succeeding and overcoming the many obstacles found in our community. Furthermore, I want to advocate about how immigrants make a positive impact to the American society and culture.

Without access to higher education, I wouldn't be able to follow my dreams. My chances of being able to help out my family and community financially would be limited. I would be stuck working at a minimum wage job, with a slim chance of progressing. Now, I want to obtain as much knowledge as I can. With the education I achieve, I want to open a business or work part of a corporation where I can move up. My ultimate goal is to become financially independent and help give back to those who have helped me on my journey.

Yesenia B., Baruch College

Degree: Journalism

Hometown: Bronx, NY

Age of Arrival: 9 years

I began to consider America my home when I realized that this is where I felt safe and that there was a community willing to help be the best version of yourself and guide you to the right path. I began to picture and plan my life here and only here.

Every family has their own story. Many are familiar. My dad was like many fathers in Mexico, and would come to the United States for a couple of years to make some money, before coming back home. Due to this routine, our family was apart a lot. So my mom decided that it would be best if we migrated to the U.S to reunite with my father and finally be a "normal" family. We left our home, family and friends and decided to come to the U.S with nothing but a bag of clothes. We arrived in Juarez, Mexico from Mexico City the first week of September 2005.

Our journey was harrowing. Finally, after weeks, we arrived in East Harlem, NY. It was definitely a disappointment not to see the luxurious NYC I used to see in the movies. But the most important thing was that we had made it and we were reunited.

I came to the U.S. at nine and have been here since, living in the Bronx. My mother enrolled my sister and I in a bilingual school and I was able to graduate from fifth grade as valedictorian. The struggle to assimilate to the American culture came my first year in middle school, when my mother thought it would be good to enroll us in a school where only English was spoken. Not all of my classmates were very accepting and I often got bullied for not being able to understand and speak English, or not wearing popular clothing brands. I had to watch everything I said or did.

Assimilating to the American culture was challenging, however, it was also a great experience. I feel very fortunate to have grown up in this country who offered me many opportunities to be the best I can be. Living in New York is the best part of it all, where you can find something new to do every time and to visit some of the most popular landmarks in the world. Facing the challenges that I did has made me appreciate things more and to take care of the opportunities that are given to me.

Family is the thing in life I value the most. My dad works as a cook in a steak house, and my mother occasionally works as a housekeeper. I have two sisters, one of them is older than me by two years and the other one is starting high school. Neither of my parents was able to attend high school, let alone college. Out of my entire family, only one cousin who lives in Mexico has had the opportunity to graduate from college, therefore, I will be the second one to do so in the Spring of 2018.

I arrived at Baruch College after graduating from BMCC and I am glad to be part of Baruch since it is one of the top public colleges in the country and offers a great journalism program! After graduation, I hope to find a job in journalism, while helping the Latino community. I especially hope to help women who are suffering domestic violence and in abusive relationships to get out of such situations and recover from the psychological and physical abuse. Aside from classes, I work as a part time babysitter and I also try to contribute to the school's newspaper weekly. My mentor is constantly pushing me to do the best that I can and reminding me of how important education is and how privileged I am to be where I am.

DACA has benefitted me in many ways. It has allowed me to pay in-state tuition, to work legally in this country and not have to worry about being unemployed, especially in a city like New York. It has also

allowed me to have insurance and the most important of all, it helped get a scholarship for college. Ending DACA puts my future at risk – and for what? While having a diploma would be a great accomplishment, it would not be useful if I can not use it work legally in the U.S. My story is not unique: many people's lives and futures depend on DACA.

DREAMers are members of the American society who wish to contribute to the success of this country but often lack the resources to do so. Allowing DREAMers to have access to higher education will not only benefit them, but will benefit the country's economy and society as a whole. DREAMers' intentions are not to cause malice to society, but on the contrary, to help their country.

“Jessica,” Borough of Manhattan Community College

Degree: Undeclared

Hometown: Bronx, NY

Age of Arrival: 2 years old

I will be a first-generation college student. I want to succeed not only for my parents but for my grandparents too. They're my motivation. Without this access to higher education, I would be working to try and help my parents. Now, thanks to TheDream.US, I can focus on my education and know that, in the future, I will be able to help my parents and my siblings. I plan to study either forensic science or forensic psychology.

My parents came to this country to seek new opportunities and to better our lives. My father never had the opportunity to go to high school; he didn't even finish middle school. My mother finished middle school but didn't go to high school either. My younger sister Stephanie has developmental delays, and I'm the one who helps my mom daily.

I was only two years old when my family moved to the United States. Everything was very different at first, because I didn't know the language. When I started kindergarten, many kids made fun of me for not speaking English. As I got older, I had to get used to the idea of not being from here and that I was going to be treated differently. I felt like people were always staring at me because I looked different, because I am Mexican.

I learned that I was undocumented when I was 10. My parents told me that, as I got older, I wouldn't have the same opportunities that my sisters would, since they're U.S. citizens. I wouldn't be able to get a job like them. Growing up, I had to get used to the idea that I wouldn't be able to go to college. That all changed with TheDream.US.

I would tell potential TheDream.US applicants to take this opportunity and work hard for what you want. At first, it's going to be hard, but in the end, it's all going to be worth it. Just imagine the smiles on your family members when they see you cross that stage and receive your diploma. Always stay positive and be happy.

“Madeline,” Hostos Community College

Degree: Community Health

Hometown: Bronx, NY

Age of Arrival: 2 years old

I'm 19 and the mother of a beautiful 3 year old. I came here when I was two, and I've loved it here since. I'm an American at heart. I found out that I was undocumented when I was fourteen.

Throughout high school, I was a member of Good Shepherd Services, which led me to my interest in social work. A social worker I met through my volunteer work introduced me to TheDream.US. I immediately went home and wrote my application. The scholarship allows me to continue my education and support my son as well. To those who are considering the scholarship: take the chance and apply, if you don't get it the first time, try again. This is a wonderful opportunity that can open so many doors; and if you are accepted, take advantage of any and everything the world gives you. As a future professional social worker, I hope to help and inspire DREAMers like me.

I will be one of the few in my family to go to college. My mother, who is an immigrant, is a bartender and a part-time nursing student. My father is still in Jamaica. He is also a student, studying to become an English teacher. My family is really important to me. If I lose my status, my whole life will be uprooted. I'll be sent back to a place that I don't know, and I'll be torn away from my son.

Agnes Soelaiman, Hunter College

Degree: Political Science and Psychology

Hometown: New York

Age of Arrival: 6 years

When I was young, I didn't think I had a mom or a dad - just grandparents. I had no memories of my parents, just knowledge of two voices - one male, one female - that called me each night from far away. I hated them for leaving me in Indonesia. I was too young to know better and to understand the weight of their decision. They left for the States to earn more money that they sent back to care for me and my grandparents. As I got older, I realized how hard they have had to work just to get me a good education. I am forever grateful to them for all that they have sacrificed to make my life easier.

It wasn't until I was six years old, five years after they left, that we were reunited in America. My expectation was that we were immediately going to have a good life — we were going to live in a big house, I was going to have lots of toys, and we would have so many friends. But it was the total opposite. I was only six years old then so I did not know any better, nor did I realize the little sacrifices they made to even get me here in the first place.

I have always viewed America as my home. Growing up here, I saw many things that were unexpected and had experiences that I would never have had living in Indonesia. But my adjustment was not easy. I was constantly picked on during my first year of school because I did not know how to speak English. After six months of struggling to figure it out, I was finally able to carry full conversations with my classmates.

When I found out that I was graduating high school a year early, instead of being proud of all of my hard work, I was stressed out about college, because I knew I did not have the resources or funding to attend. My college adviser, Holly, told me about TheDream.US scholarship. She noticed that even though I studied hard and enjoyed school, I was not even looking into colleges because I knew I would not be able to afford the tuition. My elementary school guidance counselor Ms. Rivera also pushed me very hard to apply for the scholarship. Without these two amazing angels in my life that kept motivating me and believing in my potential, I would never come to realize it myself. I was even thinking about rejecting the opportunity to graduate a year early and stay the extra year because I wanted to extend my education as much as I could and I didn't think college was in the cards for me. TheDream.US scholarship gave me the chance to imagine a future as a college student.

My parents are extremely proud that they have been able to give me the opportunity to graduate from high school and to attend college, achievements they weren't able to experience themselves. I've seen them cry with happiness when they realize that I will not have to work minimum wage jobs like they do, and will have the chance to build a successful career.

Higher education access for DREAMers is essential to our society. Just because we do not have status does not prohibit us from having amazing ideas we can contribute to this country. We can be an asset to this country, and it would be smart and beneficial to all to utilize us. If I did not have access to higher education, I would probably be working in a restaurant with my parents. There is nothing wrong with working in a restaurant and I am forever in debt to them, but they did not sacrifice everything so I can follow their footsteps. They want me to walk on my own.

My goal is to become an immigration lawyer. I want to help those who are in a similar situation to me, especially those of younger generations. I want to help people who are unable or too scared to reach out for help due to their immigration status. That fear is real, I know it all too well. But it can be overcome.

Cristopher Aguirre, Hunter College

Degree: Political Science

Hometown: Central Islip, NY

Age of Arrival: 6 months

I spent the first six months of my life in Ecuador and the next nineteen and a half years in America. And yet, I'm still not American to some people. I will always be proud to say I am Ecuadorian because that is the country I was born in and the country my parents were born in. But I identify as an American. The United States is the only country I know, because I lived my whole life here. I took my first steps here and lived every moment that I remember here in America. Just because I don't have the same legal status as others, does not make me less of an American than they are. I belong in the country I love and have grown up with. I am an American.

We, as DREAMers, deserve the chance to fulfill our potential – just like American citizens and all people do. We grew up alongside citizens, started kindergarten and graduated high school alongside citizens. We learned and grew alongside citizens. If you take away immigration status, we are all equal.

I have always had a loving home and there was nothing that my parents did not provide for me. They always made sure that I had food on my plate. It was hard for them at first in this country, struggling with money, but despite any hardships, they always made sure I was well taken care of. I never asked for much because I knew I had everything— I had my mom and my dad. I knew children my age who didn't have their parents.

Both my mother and father made it to college but only managed to complete one year. They sacrificed everything so I could have a better future, leaving the only country they knew for a new and unfamiliar place. My father was one of the best “marchando” (power walkers) in Ecuador, but he gave it all up to come to America to provide opportunities for me so I can be successful. He wants me, his first son to succeed and accomplish huge things that he knows I am capable of. I always tell my parents that what they have sacrificed for me, is something they won't regret because I am going to make them proud.

My parents are undocumented, but I was blessed to receive DACA in 2012. The program has allowed me to work, to get my driver's license, and to feel safer. But most importantly it has blessed me with TheDream.US scholarship. It is a wonderful opportunity that I value very much: I want to show America what DREAMers are capable of. That we want to succeed in life just like every other person in the country.

After college, I plan to pursue a law degree and become an attorney so I can help those who are in the same position I have been. I know how it feels to be undocumented and I want them to know that they are not alone. I want to help those who need it but are sometimes scared to ask for help or can't afford legal representation.

I remember when I was in middle school and realized that I wanted to be an attorney. My parents and I went to go buy me a suit because I had a school formal to attend. When I came out my room to show my parents how I looked, they first said that I looked handsome and that they loved the young adult I was turning into. I told my mom she is going to get used to me seeing like this, because I am going to be an attorney. I told her that I am going to come visit her and then when I'm leaving I'll say “Bye mami, tengo que ir a una consulta con mi cliente por que tengo que ir a representarle in corte mañana. Te veo mas luego, te amo” (“Bye mom, I have to go to consult with my client because I have to go represent them in court tomorrow. I'll see you later, I love you.”)

'Till this day, I always playback that memory, so I know to keep on working hard no matter the circumstances. I want to and will make my parents proud, and make the vision of what I told my mother true.

Pamela Benitez, Hunter College

Degree: Women and Gender Studies

Hometown : Flushing. NY

Age of Arrival: 5 years

Parts of my family's story echo those of millions of immigrants over the years: the underpaid overworking jobs; the struggle to make ends meet; the chase for a false and nonexistent American dream.

My dad has a JD in Paraguay, but works in construction here in New York. My mom has a degree in pharmacy and biochemistry, but works as a domestic employee. Both my parents sacrificed their careers that they worked hard to obtain in order to come to America. It's very heartbreaking to think about how they ended up doing the jobs they worked hard to escape from. We also have no family in the U.S. so it's pretty lonely sometimes, making it difficult to not regret certain decisions.

In high school, I became close to some teachers who were really understanding and supportive about my immigration status and my home life, and were like the family I missed out on. If it weren't for my college counselor and my AP calculus teacher I would have never been able to go through the college process. They kept me from going off the edge each time I encountered an obstacle in my applications which related to my status. Without them, I sometimes doubt I would have even graduated.

The best part of going to a liberal arts school in NYC is that there are so many opportunities and activities to try out if you really look. In such a diverse city, there's always a space that you can find to call your own, and I'm glad that I was able to do that on campus. Coming from a small high school, that was one of my biggest concerns. My favorite classes at Hunter College are all my women and gender studies classes.

Eventually, I would like to become a social worker and set up a clinic that caters specifically to immigrant communities. Right now, I'm part of my school's Dream Team and I will continue to work with the club in order to establish a safe environment for undocumented students on campus.

I am really open about my undocumented status and would like to encourage other, younger DREAMers that they can make it too. They should breathe deeply and know that it gets better. As long as they keep the fight going we are unstoppable.

As of now, it's hard to say that I consider America a home, because in a home you feel safe. But at the same time, this country is all I know, so I've been in the weird sense of homelessness for a while. Undocumented people are still people and we deserve to have the same opportunities as everyone else. No one should have to live their life in constant fear.

Aleksander, Kingsborough Community College

Degree: Computer Programming

Hometown: Brooklyn, NY

Age of Arrival: 6 years old

My parents knew that if I applied myself, I could have a really promising future here. They always followed my classes and school events and never accepted excuses. Without TheDream.US - and this access to higher education - I would probably be working and trying to make something out of my life, just like my parents taught me to.

My degree will give me a chance to take a step up in life. I want my college experience to help me become a better person, and I want a career where I can make enough money to take care of my mom and dad. I don't want them to ever have to work again, and I'd like to pay them back for everything they sacrificed for me. My degree in computer science will help me start my own company and make an impact in the technology world.

DACA has opened a lot of doors for me, including being eligible for this scholarship. I like that I have legal status, at least for right now. The most stressful component of potentially losing my status would be the uncertainty as to whether I can stay in the place I call home. People who are skeptical of the need for DACA/TPS should know that it is a NEED for so many people around them. I would tell potential TheDream.US applicants that anything is possible. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. My parents are proof that hardwork and commitment pay off.

In our small town in Mexico, it was difficult for my parents to make enough money to support our family. We decided to move to the U.S. but in small waves. My parents came first, for a few years, and I stayed with my grandmother. Those years were tough. I missed my family, but I understand now that they did it for my future. When I was six years old, after they saw the opportunities I could have here, I joined them. The U.S. seemed so different from Mexico when I first arrived and learning a new language was challenging. Luckily, I had plenty of supportive teachers and friends along the way who helped me improve my English.

A few years later, I became an older brother. Since my parents worked long hours to support our family, I was charged with raising my little sister. I started viewing the U.S. as my home when I moved to New York. I always knew I was undocumented, but the people in New York were always so kind to undocumented people like me. I grew up in New York, and it is the only home I know.

Aidee Silva, Lehman College

Degree: Business Health Administration

Hometown: Mount Vernon, NY

Age of Arrival: 8 years

This fall, I will begin my sophomore year of college as a proud member of the Lehman College class of 2021. I will be the first member of my family to graduate college, and as a Business Health Administration major, it is my dream to provide adequate health care services to those in need. I wouldn't be here without TheDream.US, and the last thing I would want is for this incredible educational opportunity to be taken away because of our current President and his administration.

I spent the first eight years of my life in Mexico. When my father found out my mother was pregnant, he left her to raise me alone. To provide me with a better life for me, my mother moved to the United States, leaving me behind in Mexico with distant family members. My life in Mexico was tough, but my mother was tougher. When she saved enough to move me to the United States, she was working two jobs. When I first moved to America, we lived in an apartment with seven other people, so we could afford rent.

One of the biggest challenges in my early education was learning the English language. Young kids, especially those who cannot understand the struggles of immigration, can be so cruel. I was made fun because of my clothes and my accent. For a very long time, I was discouraged every day going to school and struggled with the anxiety that I would never fit in. Over time as I grew older and moved onto middle school, and then high school, I found my circle of friends who helped me feel like I belonged.

I can't thank my mother enough for fighting so hard to provide for me, and it breaks my heart that she cannot apply for U.S. citizenship. Because she crossed the border illegally, there is no pardon available, which makes her unqualified to apply. Therefore, my mother not only has no health insurance, she also has no pension, and it will be extremely difficult for her to retire. Currently, at 46 years old, she is pursuing her middle school diploma.

America is my home and I wouldn't have it any other way. I want to finish college and fight for women like my mother, who have worked so hard in order to call America home.

“Elizabeth,” Lehman College

Degree: Liberal Arts Math and Science - Nursing

Hometown: New York

Age of Arrival: 6 years old

When I was just a toddler, my parents fled Colombia, because we were being persecuted by the army. Since I was so little, I don't remember much of the journey. I am, nonetheless, eternally grateful for that decision. Instead of fearing for our lives, I am now a first-generation college student. It's been a challenge, but, with God, everything is possible. I've learned that, in life, for a family to succeed, one person must succeed first. When one person succeeds, more opportunities are open to the entire family.

My college degree will be a breakthrough for my family. It will be our key to success. I now have the chance to attend Lehman College to study Nursing and will strive for the same success I had at LaGuardia Community College. I would tell potential applicants to Dream.US that hope is your strongest weapon. Where there is hope, there is a will to succeed. Keep studying; keep fighting for your future and your family's future.

After my family left, we sought refugee status in Canada. After five years, we moved to the United States when I was six years old. Little did we know, God had bigger plans for our family. When we first moved, I struggled; I spoke French in school, but I was bullied by the others students. I even told my parents "Je ne veux pas parler français; Je veux parler anglais." I learned English and forgot all about French. It wasn't easy, but we were able to manage.

My family has faced so many sacrifices and challenges like loneliness, economic stress, cycles of fear and hope, and more. Our family is alone in this country. The rest of our family is still in Colombia. We can't leave the U.S. to visit them because we're immigrants, and we have "no right" to be here, but we've put our status in the hands of God.

I started viewing as America my home when I was about eight years old. My family had a stable place to live and a wonderful church to go to. We grew up here, and we still reside here. Remaining in the U.S. is important to me, because I can help provide my family a better future here.

“Maya,” Lehman College

Degree: Biology

Hometown: Bronx, NY

Age of Arrival: 4 years old

I came to this country when I was about four years old. When I first stepped into this country I was confused as to where I was, a lot of faces looked unfamiliar, the only two people I recognized were my parents.

My parents left me behind for a year in order for them to be able to come over here, they told me that they didn't want to leave my sister or I behind, but it was something that needed to be done. They told me as soon as they got here, they were looking for ways to be able to bring my sister and I over. About a year later here I was.

I was young when my parents brought me over to the United States, so I didn't know what exactly was going on, all I knew was that I was going to see my parents again. But I remember every night asking for my family members that were over at the Dominican Republic. I would wake up every day and not see them, when usually their faces were all I saw when I woke up first thing in the morning.

A year passed. I was five years old, and my parents told me it was time to start school. I remember my mom putting on my uniform, she did my hair nicely, prepared me a lunchbox and out the door we went. When I got there, I didn't feel out of place, I didn't feel like I didn't belong there of course I was a child, so I wasn't really thinking about the fact that I was an undocumented immigrant. I walked into class that day and like I said I didn't really feel out of place, but I was very confused on what the people around me were saying. You see when I was a child, I only knew of one language, Spanish, so when I walked into class that day, I went around speaking Spanish to everyone I tried starting conversations with. Some replied back, others mumbled and made weird facial expressions. At this point I knew that not everyone understood me, just like I didn't understand what most of the students were saying. Even though I didn't really understand the language, that didn't stop me from excelling at my classes. My teachers were very understanding of my situation, of course they didn't know I was an undocumented immigrant, they just saw me as a child who came into this country and doesn't completely know the language. My teachers made sure that I still knew what was going on around me, they made sure that I understood the classes. They also took time out of their day to help me get familiar with the language. A few months passed by and I found myself having conversations with other students in English. Little by little, I found it less difficult to understand what others were saying to me and about a year later I think I would officially announce myself as an English speaker. Now that the language barrier was no longer a barrier, I didn't think anything would try to stop me from achieving my dreams.

Since I was a young girl, I knew that I wanted to become a pediatrician. As I got older, I was only surer of it. My parents have worked so hard since they stepped foot in this country and I want to make sure I make all their struggles worth it. I made sure I stayed on top of my classes, and even though I wasn't a perfect student, I was proud of myself. I made mistakes, but I bounced back and learned from them. Even though some things were very confusing to me, I always understood the importance of receiving an education.

I now have thirteen years living in the U.S. Thirteen years without seeing my loved ones back in the Dominican Republic. I cry at night thinking of the worst possible scenarios. What if my grandma dies and I don't get to see her or hug her one more time. Thoughts like these just pass my mind and I start thinking about all the reasons for why we should leave everything behind and go back to a place to where we are wanted.

But then I start thinking, “am I really just going to give it all up?” All my hard work and dedication for nothing. My number one goal in life is to make my parents proud of what I am achieving, giving up on my dreams is not only going to make them feel disappointed but it's going to make all the years they have been away from their families for nothing.

I don't want to be known as someone who gives up because they are going through a difficult situation. I have younger siblings so what type of example would I be setting for them if I just gave up? My immigration status shouldn't be the reason why I stop pursuing my passion. I don't want it to define me or what I am capable of achieving. I view my status as another obstacle, an obstacle that I can beat, so that at the end I still come out successful.

Applying for “TheDream.US National Scholarship” was one of my ways of slowly defeating this obstacle. Due to my status I don't get any really help from the government. Other scholarships also have the requirement of you having to be either a legal resident or U.S. citizen- I am neither. So, when it was time to start going through the college application process, my family and I were extremely worried about how we were going to make this happen. College is expensive, especially for families like mine. I don't come from a very wealthy background, so we were stressed thinking of possible solutions to this problem, but we were sure we were going to get through it.

One day at school my high school counselor came up to me and told me about a scholarship opportunity that was for students like me and my hopes went through the roof. This IS the opportunity we were looking for, this is exactly what we needed.

I started my application process and I submitted all the require documentations, which were just recommendations and essays, I was able to submit it. Now the wait had begun. I prayed and prayed that I would receive this scholarship because I really needed it as a stepping stone to get closer to my goal. I checked my email every day and I saw nothing, so I started feeling a little defeated. I was already discussing with my parents that we needed to look for other ways to be able to afford my education.

Until one day I received an email from TheDream.US and the only word that immediately made my heart start racing was “congratulations.” I immediately opened the email and started jumping because I was official a Dream U.S. Scholarship recipient. As soon as I told my mom, I could just see from her face how proud she was of me, and that just made me feel even better. She called my whole family and told them about another one my achievements. They were all thrilled by the news.

Thanks to this scholarship I was given a fair chance at receiving an education. I wasn't taken away from the opportunity of pursuing my career. My advice to other applicants and undocumented immigrants that feel like there is no way for them to succeed is, don't use your immigration status as an excuse. Use it as your motivation. Prove all those people wrong that said that there was no way for you to succeed. Make yourself proud, let yourself be able to say I defeated another obstacle in front of me. Be an example for those looking up to you and make it known that giving up should never be an option. Don't let your immigration status define who you are as a person or what you're capable of doing. Surpass the expectations that this country has for immigrants. Let's make our struggles worth it. If the key you have doesn't open the door in front of you, look for other doors that will. Even though all odds are against us, there are people out there willing to help us, we just need to seek out those opportunities and use them to our advantage.

Life as an undocumented immigrant is everything but easy. You have this part of you that you can't really share with anyone because you're afraid of the judgments or reactions. I want to be able to achieve all these great things and then be able to say, "I did it while being undocumented."

Alejandra, Queens College

Degree: Undeclared

Hometown: Jackson Heights, NY

Age of Arrival: 6 months

Thanks to TheDream.US, I've been able to realize my dream of going to college, and, hopefully I will be the first one in my family to graduate. I want to serve as an inspiration to my brother and sister. My journey to college has been rough, but I was able to get through it by working hard throughout high school, and, if I can walk across the stage at graduation and say to my parents, "I did this for you," it will all be worth it. Crossing the border was not easy; they made many sacrifices when coming to the United States because they wanted to give my siblings and I a better life. in which are paying off.

When I was in middle school, I learned that I was undocumented. My parents knew that I would see that my passport was different from my siblings' passports, so they explained to me what it meant to be undocumented. They told me that I just had to be patient and wait for a law that would give me the chance to gain legal status. The most important thing that they told me was to not feel like less of a person just because I don't quite have the same opportunities as people who are considered to be U.S citizens.

My journey started in 2000, when I was only 6 months old and had arrived to the U.S along with my mom, dad and grandma. My mom was able to complete some college and was able to find a job as an executive secretary in Mexico. My dad was only able to complete some high school which didn't benefit him when he was looking for a job. However, they decided to make the challenging journey across the border.

Now, my dad works at a restaurant in Manhattan. My mom works at home, making sure that my siblings and I have food to eat, a clean house to live in and clothes to wear. Both my little brother and sister were born in the U.S. My sister is currently a junior in highschool, and my brother is in 7th grade.

In high school, I finally began to feel like the U.S. was my home. Despite that, I still had a hard time getting through high school, but I participated in activities that I cared about and that helped. I was part of the music band and participated in the National Honor Society. I also ran on the cross-country team and played handball during my sophomore year. I even had the chance to take a few college courses while I was still in high school. One of the reasons why I am part of this scholarship is because of my guidance counselor. She helped me so much on my journey to college. She found scholarships and resources, and, most importantly, she never made me feel any less important or worthy because I was a DREAMer. She was always looking out for me as well as my parents and I am very thankful for that.

TheDream.US has given me the opportunity to integrate myself into the higher education community, something I've dreamt about for so long. I am excited to start my college experience and meet new friends. I think this will be a chance for me to feel equal among my peers and find professors and mentors to support me on my journey.

Jovana Tavizon, City College of New York

Degree: Biology

Hometown: New York

Age of Arrival: 8 years old

College has been filled with new opportunities for me. My first year, I had my first official job working in a pharmacy. Now, I am working in a hospital. I love helping people and being part of their recovery processes.

I received DACA when I was 15, and it has benefited my life greatly. I am able to work and help out my family here and in Mexico. I was able to participate in a pharmacy technician program where I was trained to be a certified pharmacy technician and get a job at a local pharmacy. DACA gave us the chance to prove to our communities that even though we are undocumented, we can excel in school, build a successful life, and give back to society.

I originally intended to major in engineering, but after I spoke with my professors about life as an engineer, I realized that it was not what I wanted to do. Now I am a biology major, because I want to become a Nurse Practitioner in the NICU. I have always loved children and I would like to be part of the team that helps babies that are sick get on a path to recovery and hopefully a healthy life. I want to be able to make my parents proud and reassure them that all of their sacrifices and struggles were worth it, and that they can let go and begin to relax because I can take care of them like they took care of me.

I consider America as half of my home, because although I have lived here for more than half my life, only half my family is here. If all my family was here, in one place, then I would see the United States as my home. Although it doesn't feel completely like my home, I can't imagine living anywhere else. I know that here I have a good job, I can finish my education, I can start my career, and eventually raise a family of my own.

I was eight years old when we came to the United States, and I have been living in New York City ever since. At first, I found living in America difficult because I missed my family in Mexico and I had trouble learning English. I was bullied in school and I didn't feel like I belonged here. After a year and a half of learning the language, things got better at school, but there was still plenty to get used to.

Growing up, I was a member of a co-ed boy scout troop called Venture Crew for five years, and the leaders of the troop became like family to me. They helped me and taught me many important lessons about life and the real world that I still keep with me to this day. As a troop, we would perform community service and travel around the United States visiting national parks. I learned the value of serving my community, and it is something I continue to aspire to.

My college advisor in high school told me about TheDream.US scholarship opportunity, and I immediately applied. If I wasn't fortunate enough to receive the scholarship, I would probably be working two jobs and saving money to pay for my younger brother's college education. I don't want my dad, who is already working two jobs, to have to carry that burden alone. This scholarship came to me as a blessing, and I am forever grateful for it.

It is important for other people who are skeptical of DACA to know that there is a society of undocumented students that are working hard and fighting to have a successful life in a country where we have often been told that we don't belong. We do belong, because we were brought here to have a better life, and that is why, in part, the United States was founded in the first place.

Ita-Ini Magdaleno, York College

Degree: Political Science

Hometown: New York

Age of Arrival: 3 years old

I am a DACA-recipient, and, thanks to TheDream.US Scholarship, I was able to go to college. I never imagined that something like that could happen to an undocumented student, but, with hard work and dedication, anything is possible.

The U.S. became my home when I moved here at age three. I grew up learning the history of America and attending school here. During my childhood, I was lucky to live in an environment that was free of hatred and was very supportive. I live in New York - a city full of different cultures – and I grew up in a Latino community where everyone spoke Spanish, which meant that my mother didn't have to struggle to communicate with people, like some other immigrants do.

I have always known I am undocumented. My parents told me as soon as I was able to understand, and even though I haven't always fully understood what it meant to be undocumented, I learned slowly. At first, I realized I couldn't travel and was prohibited from many 'normal' things. Then, I received DACA when I was 15, and it has changed my life. Through DACA, I am able to go to school, I am able to work, and I am able to file taxes. I am fully part of society.

Now, in college, I want to study political science, because I want to make a difference in the immigrant community and help give immigrants a voice. Too many immigrants have to endure hardships and are mistreated, because they feel incapable of defending themselves. Too many are viewed as being less than others because of their nationality. I am lucky to speak both English and Spanish and to be able to defend myself from people who try to bring me down with their words.

My sister is one year older than me and she's in college as well. Both my sister and I know firsthand the importance of college. My mom only finished elementary school, and we want to make her proud. She raised us on her own, and she was extremely proud when I received a full scholarship to college. She raised intelligent daughters who, because of her hard work and dedication, are able to accomplish anything. All three of us push one another to do better and be better.

I think that higher education access for DREAMers is important, because we're no different than documented people. All people have dreams of becoming someone and having success.

Johanza Blaize, York College

Degree: Computer Technology

Hometown: Jamaica, NY

Age of Arrival: 2 years old

There's a power and comfort in knowing that you are not alone in what you may be going through. In high school, I co-founded an immigration awareness group called the "Alienated Aliens" to unite all of the seniors who were undocumented. We felt doing this in our senior year was essential, because we were all about to start college applications. Everyone in our grade was scurrying to fill out their FASFA, sign up for the military, and start their scholarship letters, but these were all things I wasn't fully eligible for.

Before starting the organization, I had no idea that I wasn't the only one with this problem. I created the group to motivate and encourage students that had to work past the same struggle that I was going through. I wish I had started the club sooner, because it is not just seniors that have this problem, but freshman, sophomores, juniors, and even middle schoolers who struggled in silence. We learned about each other's fears and accomplishments and grew from each other's stories and experiences.

I've always known I was different in some way, but it wasn't anything I worried about or ever afraid to share. I was raised to appreciate and love diversity and uniqueness. What I was not aware of was how being 'different' would affect me as I grew older.

My sister and I were born on the island of Trinidad and Tobago, but my mother and father brought us to American soil when I was 2 years old. As children, we never understood why we left our home country, but now that we are older we understand why our parents decided to make such a big leap — they hoped for better opportunities in the Big Apple.

My family's adjustment to America was far from lollipops and rainbows. We struggled to get food on the table, my parents went through a serious rough patch when it came to their marriage, and the only family members we have here are hundreds of miles away. And coming to America shortly after 9/11 made our situation even more difficult — but we never lost faith. For the past 16 years, we've been struggling, but we've also been surviving.

Being DACAmented has made me feel a little less like an outsider. Even though it's okay to stand out, I now fit in a little more. More doors have opened for me and some things, like finding a job and paying taxes, have become so much easier. Through DACA, I received my work authorization card and social security number, and I applied for my first job without any issues.

I can proudly say that Jesus Christ played a strong role in my family's life. Without Him, we wouldn't have received any of the blessings that He has given us. Even though we had no food, our church at the time ordered boxes and boxes of food goods to be delivered to our home on a monthly basis. My father then received a job that relieved most of the burden. We didn't struggle as much as we use to. Our life has been a rollercoaster and the ride still has a long way to go, but we're going to stick through it till the end.

I believe that higher education for DREAMers is important, because it's a way for boundaries to be broken. Before I received TheDream.US scholarship I didn't see myself going to college, simply because I didn't have the funds to pay for college. But because of TheDream.US, I was able to imagine myself as a college student.

I didn't see myself getting too far, especially without a college degree, but I've been given the chance to walk through some open doors. I love learning about and working with technology, and I can recognize the value of education -- it gives you that option to excel and to accomplish new things.

TheDream.US scholarship gives young individuals a second chance, a chance to prove their worth. I want to encourage others to know, "There's always a way. YOU are living proof of that!"

Yari Ortega, Delaware State University

Degree: Sociology

Hometown: Forest Park, GA

Age of Arrival: 7 years old

When I first arrived in the U.S., I felt lost. I held on to the one thing that I knew I wanted: knowledge and a good education. I became a book worm and did everything I could to learn. Thanks to TheDream.US scholarship, I will be a first generation college student. I will do anything to make my mother proud. She sent me to this country 13 years ago for me to get an education, and I will not let her down. I plan to obtain my Bachelor's degree and return to Georgia to help the immigrant community.

I believed that without the access to higher education, I would be another statistic of yet another immigrant who works from sun up to sun down making minimum wage to survive. I want to learn as much as I can and prove that the immigrant population is here to make their dreams come true. I want to testify to those who stand against us that no matter how much they want us out, we were brought here because our parents believe in the American Dream.

I come from a single parent household and am the youngest of seven. All of my family, with the exception of one sister, have no immigration status and work hard labor jobs. My mom works very hard as a custodian for a factory and despite being 60-years-old, will not be retiring any time soon. We migrated to the U.S. one by one. When I turned seven I came to the U.S. I remember we traveled to the frontera, and I wasn't sure what was happening. A lady I did not know came and my mom told me to go with her, and that she would see me soon. I cried so much, but now I know she did what she thought was best. We were separated for almost two years until she came to the U.S. to live with us.

My transition into American life was hard and was held back a grade in school due to the language barrier. I struggled with pronouncing different words, and was bullied for most of my time in elementary school. I'll never forget when my fifth grade teacher called me out in front of the whole class for mistaking "man" for "men." Ever since that moment, I've endlessly read books. I would say the words out loud in order to learn how to pronounce them.

Similar to word pronunciations, I didn't really see the difference between my legal or illegal status as a kid. That all changed when I was 12. Someone broke into my house while I was sleeping. They beat me up and then robbed the house. When the police came, they asked my sisters for our IDs, but we didn't have any. The police officer took one look at me, my face bruised and in pain, and said he could only take a statement. He left without doing anything to help us. No matter what we tried, nobody would help us because of our immigration status. That was when I realized I was undocumented and, to them, unworthy of justice.

People say that because I am not a U.S citizen, I am not from here, I am not American, and that I do not belong. This is the furthest thing from true. My worth is not my immigration status. I have helped my school, my community, and my county because I love it. The U.S has been my home since I was a little girl. I have vague memories of my life in Mexico, but nothing concrete. I fell in love with the idea of the American Dream, and view myself as an American. I participated in JROTC and learned about the armed forces and how this country is unique and free. I stand with pride reciting the Pledge of Allegiance because I believe in every word of it. I am part of this nation, and I consider it my home. I grew up here and believe in the values of what the U.S represents.

The uncertainty of whether or not I will be deported is overwhelming, but I want to tell all the other young immigrants to never give up. Only those who fight against the injustice will reach the end. Don't ever be afraid to speak up, we must rise as one and show them we are here, and we are here to stay. Let's demand a seat at the table. We will unite and make our dreams become a reality. Por mi mamá, I will be the best I can be and reach high places.

Bryan Reyes, Delaware State University

Degree: Electrical Engineering

Hometown: North Carolina

Age of Arrival: 40 days old

When I found out I received TheDream.US scholarship, my goals changed - they became much bigger.

My family came to the United States when I was less than a year old, so America has always been my home. My mom and my stepdad never finished middle school, which makes me a first generation college student in my family.

Growing up in America was difficult at times. We lived in the poorest county in our state, and my parents sent much of the money they earned back to Mexico, to help our other family members.

When I was 15, I was diagnosed with cancer, and my entire family's life changed. My mom had to quit her job to be there for me while I was undergoing treatment, leaving my dad to be the sole provider for almost two years. He rarely had the day off. At times, I felt like I was causing so much pain and suffering to the people supporting me, and I always felt like people pitied my family - which I hated.

My friend Cesar really helped me through. He would sometimes come with me to chemotherapy to give my mom a break. He was really helpful during the hardest time in my life.

Thankfully, I'm in remission now, and I can do more of the things I love, like playing soccer. When I came back to my soccer team, I asked my coach to treat me like any other player, and he has. With the help of people like my coach, I've had things to focus on that make me feel like a normal kid.

After school I waited tables at a local restaurant to help my family pay for my hospital bills. But that hasn't kept me from prioritizing my academics.

I graduated high school with honors and an associates degree in Electrical Systems Technology also with honors. Now, I plan to continue my education and work towards a bachelors degree in Electrical Engineering at Delaware State.

One day, I want to have my own engineering firm. I hope to be a successful business owner and be able to give my family the life they deserve.

Tisha Calixte, Broward College

Degree: Nursing

Hometown: Lauderhill, Florida

Age of Arrival: 4 years old

When you're undocumented, applying to colleges and universities is an especially painful process. I sat and stared at my unfinished college applications and cried. They were nearly finished - aside from the citizenship section. When I finally found a college willing to give me a chance, I didn't have money to afford it. Then, I received TheDream.US scholarship, and everything changed. College is finally a possibility.

I am a first generation college student. At Broward College, I plan to study nursing. I want help those that don't have access to the proper healthcare, be passionate about my work, and serve as a role model for my four siblings.

When I was just four years old, my family came from the Bahamas to the States. The first few years were really difficult. I was jealous of the kids around me. I was teased, because my accent was different and made me stand out. My mom had to work long hours with little pay and tolerated disrespectful bosses and coworkers, because it is not easy to work without proper documentation. Once, we were even conned by someone who claimed they would help us receive documentation. My mother sacrificed so much to provide us with a good life.

The most stressful thing about living without documentation is the risk of being deported. Things in America are drastically changing. There's no telling what will happen tomorrow or the next day. However, I want other undocumented students to know: even when things seem to not be going to well, keep faith that it will get better. Where there's a will, there's a way! There are organizations like TheDream.US that will help you achieve all that you dream about.

Fernanda Lima, Delaware State University

Degree: Nursing

Hometown: Norcross, GA

Age of Arrival: 4 years old

My mom is my hero; a single mother of two and a marvelous nurse. Like parents throughout history and across backgrounds, she has always sacrificed on our behalf so that we could have a better life.

We arrived from Brazil, settling in Georgia, when I was just four years old. The transition was not always easy: the apartment we lived in was barely furnished and my sister and I shared a bed for the first three or four years in America. My mother sacrificed her nursing career and left behind her house, her car, and most everything she owned so that we could have a shot at the American dream. She started working cleaning houses to support me and my sister and is still cleaning houses to this day, almost twenty years later.

Despite the hardships, I remember our arrival in this country being very happy. We learned how to work hard and we learned to appreciate others. I believe that growing up in America taught us how to be better people. America has always felt like home to me.

DREAMers came here for a purpose. We have dreams to benefit this country and dreams to make the sacrifices of our parents worth it for us. We didn't come here to live off the government or anyone else's hard work besides our own. There should always be a need for motivated young adults to have the ability to better themselves and ultimately the country. We wouldn't be here if we didn't recognize just how wonderful this country is. We are not here to harm it. We are here to help it and to push it forward.

After graduating with a nursing degree, I plan on becoming a nurse and eventually a nurse practitioner. I want to work in the NICU at a hospital, or even become part of the organization Nurses Without Borders, in order to fight for the lives that cannot yet fight on their own. In my own way, I also want to honor my mother and her original career and ongoing sacrifice - a sacrifice so familiar to millions of parents across the world.

Miguel, Florida International University

Degree: Mechanical Engineering

Hometown: Homestead, FL

Age of Arrival: 7 months

I've always envisioned having a college degree. Now, with the help of TheDream.US, I am proud to say that I will be attending Florida International University to study mechanical engineering.

School has always played an important part in my life. In high school, I was a member of the Math Honors Society, Science Honors Society, German Honors Society, and Yearbook Club. My calculus teacher inspired my passion for engineering, and my counselor helped me research scholarships.

My mom and dad know the power of education and inspire me to be passionate about learning. In Peru, my mother earned her Master's degree in engineering, and my father obtained his Juris Doctorate. They sacrificed their families and careers for me. I want to make them proud.

My family and I came to the United States from Peru when I was just seven months old. The United States is the only home I've ever known. If I have to return to Peru, I will feel like a foreigner. I am not fluent in Spanish, and my roots are here - not in Peru.

TheDream.US scholarship has made a huge difference in my life and I would encourage other DREAMers to never let go of their dreams and aim high!

Camila, Florida International University

Degree: International Business and Supply Chain Management and Logistics

Hometown: Miami, FL

Age of Arrival: 5 years old

Many of my childhood weekends were spent going on a car ride with my family around Miami, and I remember I would get so frustrated with my dad, because we would find really beautiful places, but we wouldn't stop anywhere, we were just passing by.

I had a different upbringing compared to most children. At the age of five, I emigrated with my mother and sister from Argentina to reunite with my dad, who had emigrated a few months earlier in hopes of preparing a new home for us in Miami, FL. My parents had given up on their home country after realizing that its corruption and lack of justice offered no opportunities to their two young daughters.

Both college graduates, my parents realized they couldn't do much with their degrees in Miami, so they founded their own packaging healthy food company, before healthy food was all the craze. When my sister and I weren't in school, we would be at the warehouse helping my parents pack the finished goods in boxes and place them in pallets. Other times, my sister and I raced down the aisles lined with pallets, riding on pallet jacks or rolling chairs - we were kids after all. But now, as I look back I realize just how much my parents gave up for us. Still, each morning, they leave home at 6 am for work. Working in production, they spend the whole day carrying material that weighs over 50 lbs, in a Miami-heated warehouse with no air conditioning, just industrial fans. Unsurprisingly, both suffer from chronic back pain, and my mom has developed arthritis. Despite the harsh working conditions, my parents have kept on working with the hope that their young girls would have a better life in this new land full of opportunities.

My parents, like most, had big dreams for me and my sister. As kids, my dad signed us up for every team sport he could think of -- hoping we'd be good enough to receive a scholarship for college. My mom, on the other hand, enrolled us in the best education programs and mapped out our education from elementary to high school to ensure we'd receive academic scholarships. My mom made the better bet. We weren't great athletes, but we excelled in school. We had to, as our mom constantly reminded us that our only job was to study and get scholarships, because we couldn't afford a college education through our own means. We didn't realize at the time just how impossible college would be for us, until I became a senior in high school. I always knew about our legal status, but education was my golden ticket out, or so I thought.

As I began applying for my dream schools, my college advisor mentioned that I couldn't access financial aid of any kind even though my grades and extracurricular were above the requirements. Then, I began receiving the acceptance letters without a financial aid package attached. Instead, it noted that I would be paying as an international student, and my acceptance was dependent on my ability to pay the tuition. I was devastated until I discovered Miami Dade Honors College, which offered to pay a third of my tuition and offered a list of private scholarships I could apply to cover the remainder of the costs. A year later, Florida would pass a law giving DACA students access to in-state tuition. The two years at Miami Dade College were fully covered by scholarships, and I began to hope again as I applied to transfer to a university, but despite all of this there were always reminders of our status.

When my sister and I finally got our license through DACA, we began taking my parents to work to avoid "las redadas" - the raids - that threatened the unity of our family with deportation. The thousands of dollars my parents spent on legal assistance to fix our status would not be enough to disappear the threat of deportation. Feeling like you need to hide constantly, having a prayer to God as your only consolation

until you'd get home, and see your parents at home with you took a toll. But, you learn not to take any moment with your family for granted. I began to believe that I was lucky to have had the two years at Miami Dade College, but now it was time to support my family by working.

I believed that until the Dream.US scholarship who partnered with Florida International University to give highly motivated DACA student full scholarships. That meant didn't have to sacrifice my education to support my family - I could study full time and work part time.

For those that question the need for immigration reform, I challenged them to simply go to a grocery store. Who harvests the food? Who delivers the food? Go to your company. Who are your customers? Who are building the infrastructure that facilitate your commute? If they determine that the immigrant community has no stake in facilitating their access to food and employment, then legislation to protect the undocumented community isn't necessary. But, if they determine that we are essential to their daily living, they should call their representative in Congress and tell them to support a comprehensive immigration reform that won't leave Dreamers orphaned.

If a legislative solution isn't passed, I will leave. America is the only home I know, but I refuse to offer my mind and money to a country that doesn't want me, my family, or other hard-working and smart people. I refuse to continue gazing out the window as I pass by beautiful places without having a chance to stop and explore. I come to this country with no demands, just a plea to let us fulfill our dreams here.

Romina Montenegro, Florida International University

Degree: Public Administration

Hometown: Miami, FL

Age of Arrival: 2 years old

DREAMers help make this country move. We are strong, determined, and fierce pursuers of our goals. I want other DREAMers to fight for a chance to receive higher education. It is worth it - for all of us in this country.

My family moved from Argentina to Miami in October of 2001, when I was just two years old. My brother and sister were not able to attend college. My dad has done construction work since he arrived at the States, and my mother is a disabled housewife. We currently live at the poverty level, making saving for college unfathomable. My parents gave up their large family, the equivalent of university degrees of Argentina, and their home to seek a better future for their kids.

I've always known I was undocumented and that I had no way of legalizing my status. But it wasn't until I was applying to scholarships and schools that I fully realized how my immigration status influenced nearly every aspect of the process for me.

I went to an all girls' public high school. There, I had a wonderful teacher who helped me through panic attacks, sadness, and worries about my sexuality and immigration status. During high school, I was very involved in my church, volunteering, and was on the community swim team. I was also in a free orchestra program for kids at a local recreational center, where I was the main piano player.

When I was accepted into Florida International University, my parents and I cried tears of joy. Not long after, the reality of finances set in, and I began scouring the internet for scholarships. I came across TheDream.US, and knew that I needed to apply. With DACA and TheDream.US, I feel as though I have a chance at the life that my parents dreamed about when they moved to America. I plan to study Public Administration, so I can give back to the community that raised me.

I have benefitted in ways that I never thought possible thanks to DACA and TheDream.US, and I pledge to never take these chances for granted.

Rothschild Toussaint, Miami Dade Honors College

Degree: Economics

Hometown: Miami, FL

Age of Arrival: 9 years old

I came to the U.S. when I was nine years old, after an earthquake ravaged my family's home in Haiti. Since the earthquake wrecked the country, we traveled to the Dominican Republic and lived there for a year until our Temporary Protected Status was approved. Once we arrived in the States, my entire family slept in one room and my mom worked several odd jobs to support us. My father died in 2004 and since then my mother has been supporting my two older brothers and me. Today, my eldest brother lives in Haiti and is a tutor, and my second older brother is finishing up his studies at Florida International University.

Growing up in America has been a unique experience for me. I love the culture and the language even though learning English was tough initially. Making new friends in school was also sometimes difficult, but I never let it get me down. Even with its challenges, I've always known America is my home. I've met some of my best friends here and have been granted so many opportunities and valuable experiences that I would never have imagined. Remaining in the U.S. is important to me because I consider myself an American at my core, and I want to do amazing things for this country.

I know not everyone understands the need for TPS, but they can imagine being in our shoes and knowing the benefits TPS and TheDream.US provide people like me.

I am now a student at Miami Dade Honors College. My college counselor told me about TheDream.US and because of their help, I am able to stay in school. My goal is to work in financial services at an international organization that helps poor countries develop and prosper. With access to higher education, I can achieve this dream and one day be able to help my mother.

I have only known America as a home and just want a chance to make something of myself. I want to become the best person I can be, academically and personally. I want to help others. This what TheDream.US has granted me.

Dino, Miami Dade College

Degree: Physical Therapy

Hometown: Miami, FL

Age of Arrival: 5 years old

The process of applying for college is very stressful for everyone, but for me it was a bit different. For every application, I needed to take a completely different route due to my status. My DACA status has served as a shield for the last two years and provided a small pathway with light waiting at the end. However, while DACA gave me the ability to go to school, it didn't come with financial aid. While coping with the stress of applications, I was also unsure how I would afford it. My school counselor guided me towards TheDream.US - my gift from God and my only hope of attending college.

I plan to take advantage of every opportunity this country has to offer, obtain a higher education, and remain in the United States to show my parents and my family that all of their hard work, sacrifice, and pain over the last 12 years paid off. I want to fall in love with learning and put all of my energy towards being a great student and planning for my future - not worrying about where my future will be.

I am studying physical therapy because of my love for sports and exercise. In the future, I would love to take care of sport-related injuries. I hope I can continue to be a great athlete, and, above all else, I hope more than anything to be happy, to love my job, to feel like a success, and to serve as a role model to kids who don't think they have a chance.

At just 5 years old, my family - my mom, dad, two siblings, and I - decided to take the risk and relocate to the United States. At first, I thought we were just coming on a vacation. I was in love with Miami, but I was too young to understand what was happening. Thankfully, learning to speak English came very easily for me, and I mastered the language in just a year - well, as much as a second grader needs to know. My two siblings, both older, were unable to finish college, but I never wanted that for myself. Neither of my parents has an official degree either. But, my mother held a high-level job at an important company back home, and my father owned a shoe company. Neither of those jobs translated in the U.S.

The sacrifices my parents have made and are still making are endless. Even the smallest privileges, such as my dad being able to safely drive me to soccer practice, were taken away from us. My parents, and later on my siblings and I, have given up so much of what the rest of society takes for granted to remain "safer" in this country.

At an early age, I became very curious as to why my family had not been back to visit our relatives in Mexico. I finally realized that we were undocumented when I was about 14 - right when I was getting ready to apply for the DACA status. Growing up in America in an undocumented family was bittersweet. Miami is a very unique place given the abundance of Latinos living here, which was a huge relief as we didn't feel completely alone.

The town where I grew up, however, was another story. It's a very small wealthy town, and, as I moved past my elementary years, my family's lack of wealth became more evident. I realized I was nowhere close to being similar to these kids, who owned luxury cars at the age of 15, lived in big mansions, and attended private schools.

On the other hand, growing up in America had many advantages. I got to learn another culture, language and even visit other parts of the country. I had the privilege of meeting all kinds of people and being

open-minded to many situations and possibilities. It gave me the motivation to one day be successful like the people who used to intimidate me.

Growing up in America has had ups and downs, but, even if I've felt like an outcast, I've learned the value of hard work and to leave my insecurities behind me. I feel at home here in the US, but I think I would feel at home in Mexico too. Even though I know this country more, the connection still remains with my country of birth.

Kevyn Jimenez, Miami Dade College / Florida International University

Degree: Criminal Justice

Hometown: Homestead, Florida

Age of Arrival: 6 years old

I wouldn't be in America, pursuing a higher education, without the support of my family, friends, and inspiration from my role models. My teachers, who motivated me to work harder and become a better writer; President Obama, who taught me to dream big and never give up; and TheDream.US, which gave me the opportunity to pursue my dream of completing my college degree. After college, I hope to become a detective and eventually join the FBI.

I didn't know that I was undocumented until the third grade, President Barack Obama was elected president and I knew from that point on anything was possible in the United States of America. When I arrived home, I told my mother that I wanted to be president just like Barack Obama. She told me that, given my status, I could never be president, because I was an immigrant. My immigration story began when I was six years old. My mother and I walked across a Mexican desert and then crossed the Rio Grande river, floating on large donut floats. I was scared but I didn't give in and kept moving forward. I was determined, I knew fear had nothing on me.

I was really excited to come to the United States, but I was still sad to leave my family in Mexico. Adjusting to life in the U.S was strange at first. After all, it was a brand new world for me - the language, culture, shopping, and food were all very different. I felt different, but yet I felt comfortable. I learned English quickly and adjusted to the 'American Lifestyle.' I considered it home the moment I arrived in Homestead, Florida.

My mom works at a nursery, and she recently got a raise of \$0.50 cents. It's not a lot, but she doesn't complain because it's better than nothing. She didn't finish high school, instead she came to the U.S and worked for me. My biological father left us shortly after I was born. I was fatherless, but I didn't care, because later on in my life I met my stepfather and he raised me like I was his blood. He finished college, and now works as an electrician. I have such an amazing and supportive family, even if they don't have a lot they are still very loving. My goal is to make my parents proud and accomplish my goals I have set up for myself.

Edwin Herrera, Miami Dade College / Florida International University

Degree: Architecture

Age of Arrival: 8 years old

I like the saying that he who gives a future to one person, gives a future to a thousand others. Through the sacrifices of my parents and this scholarship, I have a promising future. I want help give the same chance to others.

We risked it all to come here, and I am so glad we did, because I wouldn't have wanted to grow up in any other country. I was treated well by my teachers, my peers, my soccer teammates, and my wider community while growing up and going to school in America, for which I am grateful. I value the sense of community and support this country has given me.

It was incredibly important for us to come to this country-- Honduras had become a country of blood and little hope. If we wanted to survive and have any shot at a better life, the trip across the border, though risky, was crucial. I was eight years old when my parents and I came to this country by foot.

Of course there have been difficult moments in my life, and I imagine those moments -- when I have seriously questioned my future because of my status -- will continue to plague my mind throughout my life. Not having documentation is always in the back of my mind; it is a lingering thought that I can never seem to shake. This thought, however, also fuels me to push myself to achieve success and pursue my passions, largely by pursuing a higher education, with the help of TheDream.US scholarship.

I completed my associate's degree in arts last year, and am currently pursuing a Master's degree in landscape architecture. TheDream.US gave me this future and this opportunity and, now, I am equipping myself with the means to give a bright future to a thousand others. I plan to help support TheDream.US in any way I can, whether that means telling my story, making phone calls to prospective students, or simply leading by example. I want to reach my personal best in school and my professional life, but I also want to help others achieve the same.

Despite the obstacles and the challenges that are a direct result of being an immigrant, particularly an undocumented immigrant in this country, the payoff is always greater, and the good outweighs the bad. Remaining positive throughout my life has given me the direction and energy I need to forge my own path, together with the support of family, mentors, and, now, this scholarship.

Kevin Ortiz, University of Central Florida

Degree: Finance

Hometown: Orlando, FL

Age of Arrival: 12 years old

I believe that there are 3 components to the “Key to Joy.” Set high standards for yourself, have low expectations from others towards you and dream big!

When I received DACA in the fall of 2013, I knew it was time. It was time for my deferred dream to explode. It was time to return to college. I finally had an identification card and enough savings to start college without getting into ridiculous debt. Even if I had to get student loans, I was not stopping! Then, I found TheDream.US scholarship and the world changed. Receiving the generous scholarship helped me beyond the money – it helped me psychologically. I finally felt that I had someone in my corner. I had someone who believed in me. The support pushed me into high gear.

During my senior year of high school, I was a Dual Enrollment Student with Valencia Community College. By the time I graduated high school in 2008, I had earned 33 college credits thanks to dual enrollment courses and AP classes. I graduated with a 4.3 GPA and was well on my way to college. At least, that is what my teachers thought. My dream for a college education turned into a dream deferred. DACA didn’t exist in 2008. Florida in-state tuition for select undocumented students did not exist in 2008, and federal aid for undocumented students still does not exist.

Despite these obstacles, I always knew that one I would go to college. Someday, the stars would align and I needed to be ready. So, I saved my money. In 2014, with the help of DACA, in-state tuition, and the money I saved working fulltime for six years, I returned with a vengeance to Valencia College. I would graduate with my associates degree and a 4.0 in the summer of 2015.

In the fall of 2015, I transferred to University of Central Florida to pursue a bachelor’s degree in business administration. It made sense to stay in Orlando – I could save on housing, support my family, and continue my job as a line cook. While attending college, I continued to work 30 hours a week in a restaurant. During my first semester at UCF, I enrolled in 6 classes and kept my job. It wasn’t easy, but the decision was worth it. I got straight A’s that semester and made it to the President’s Honor Roll.

My second semester at UCF, everything changed. I realized that a degree would not guarantee a job upon graduation. If I was going to get my dream job, I had to engage beyond the academics. My new mentality led me to complete three internships – an unpaid marketing internship with Prospera USA, a non-profit organization supporting Hispanic entrepreneurs in Florida; an unpaid portfolio management internship with Ameriprise Financial Services; and an internship with Boeing Commercial Airplanes in Seattle, WA. To intern with the greatest airplane manufacturer in the world was by far the greatest experience of my college career, as it allowed me to grow as a business individual and experience a new city in the Pacific Northwest. It simply would not have been possible without DACA.

I was very involved on campus as well. I served as a student ambassador for the College of Business. I received the Dean’s Excellence Award for my work with the Onboarding Committee. One of the initiatives I helped developed was so well received by the students, it was incorporated into a new class at the college. Every transfer student at UCF Business must take the class and I got the chance to teach a one-hour lecture during its inaugural semester in the fall of 2017. That is my legacy at UCF!

I am also a member of ALPFA, a founding member of the Latino Leadership Council and the Dreamers at UCF student club.

Academics always came easily to me – I felt I was well ahead of my classmates in all subjects but the language. I was bullied during middle and high school because of my accent, but I kept working hard. It was tough at times, but the books and the video games helped me get through it. I've always known the importance of my studies, especially given my family's status.

My father migrated to the United States when I was five years old and sent remesas to my family to support us. It wasn't until seven years later that I had a chance to live and interact with my father daily. I was 12 years old when we crossed the desert to join my father. My brother was 18 at the time, so he does not qualify for DACA like me. It hurts to see him without the same opportunities as me and my sister. But, there was no way that my brother would have stayed behind while my mother, my sister and I came to the U.S. He deserves better. He deserves the same opportunity.

My father has held two jobs for over 15 years, washing dishes during the weekends and lawn care during the weekdays. He had a legal driver's license from 2000 to 2008, and even managed to purchase a nice truck in 2007. Back then, it was easier to obtain a license for up to eight years. Since 2008, he refuses to drive – with no license, he understands the risk of driving for our family

I have been the only driver in the house since 2014. I drive my family to church, doctor's appointments, the supermarket and to work.

My mother is the rock and spiritual leader of the family. She could never help my sister and I with school work because of language barriers, but she always made sure we had clean clothes and food to eat every night. One of my long-term goals is to purchase a home for my mother and father. They deserve it. They are the original dreamers. They have inspired me for greatness. I aspire to inspire the next generation as well!

I'm currently working towards getting into business school for an MBA. Less than 10% of Latino undergrads get a graduate degree. I wish to be part of the change! Currently, I'm applying to finance rotational programs, get work experience and then apply to a great MBA school. I have my eyes set on Harvard Business School. During the Adelante Conference at HBS last fall, I learned just how difficult and possible it is to get into HBS. While, challenging, I won't let the difficulty stop me. Not this time.

The U.S and Mexico are both my home. "Yo soy de aqui, y de alla!" Mexico is where my family and I were born, so it will always be my home. Nevertheless, I wish to stay in the U.S. for now, because I have lived here over half of my life. It is where I became the man I am today. There is no greater turmoil within me than the question of how do I feel about my country and how does my country feel about me? All I am seeking is a fair and impartial opportunity to live my life and support both my countries.

“Ruby,” University of Central Florida

Degree: Political Science and Journalism

Hometown: Wellington, Florida

Age of Arrival: 2 years old

The United States is all I have ever known, the only home I've ever known. I was only two years old when my parents brought me to live in America, and I have lived here ever since. My childhood was typical – I went to school, watched Disney movies with friends, and traveled to Orlando for family vacations. In high school, I was a varsity swimmer and a member of the Honor society. Papers or no papers, I grew up American.

When I was ten years old, a family friend was deported, which prompted my parents to explain to me the exact implications of our status, or lack thereof. But, even still, I didn't truly understand what it meant to be 'undocumented' until the end of high school, when I started to think about and plan for my future. That's when it hit me: applying to college, starting a career, and, one day, having a family of my own would all be very difficult to accomplish because of my status.

And then, in 2014, I became DACA-mented. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA program, allowed me to get a work permit, which allowed me to get a job to pay off my expenses, and attain a driver's license. I'd always dreamt of attending UCF, but I knew I couldn't afford to go.

Thanks to TheDream.US scholarship, my tuition was covered, and I can remove that once seemingly far-off goal from my list.

This semester I began journalism classes. I was accepted into the prestigious program, and I can't wait to learn how to report the news and study in my school's professional news station. I hope to become a reporter, and eventually report on politics from a nonpartisan perspective.

DACA is extremely beneficial to so many young people in this country. It facilitates access to higher education, which, in turn, enables us to move ahead and become active members in the workforce and in society. Our situation should not define us.

For those who are wary of DACA, I would explain to them that you must be a functioning member of society to become DACAmented. I would take the time to educate them about what it is like to be undocumented in America, especially how hard it is to become documented.

I try not to think about what happens if DACA is repealed, because it causes my anxiety to spike — I try to live in the moment instead.

I am part of the 'DREAMers' club at my college, and I am now the communications officer. The other DREAMers at my school are my main support system. Whenever I meet a younger DREAMer, I tell them to go for their dreams without inhibition, and never be afraid to chase what they want to do.

Martha, Dominican University

Degree: Marketing

Hometown: Chicago, Illinois

Age of Arrival: 3 years old

When I learned that I had been awarded TheDream.US scholarship, my heart skipped a beat. It was the start of a new story. With the help of Dominican University and TheDream.US, I will be completing my bachelor's degree. I plan to study marketing. Aside from my major, what I want from my college experience is love, knowledge, experience, growth, and power.

To those skeptical of DACA and TPS, I would show them face of the millions of people helped by these programs - not just undocumented people but the American economy and citizens. DACA/TPS recipients are doctors, nurses, teachers, business owners, taxpayers, home owners, and so much more. We are classmates of your children. We are students. But most importantly, we are humans that want an education and a chance to succeed in the country we call home.

My parents were always open with me about my status. They taught me to work twice as hard to get somewhere in life. They insisted however that, with education, everything is possible. I never really felt uncomfortable about my undocumented status, since I received my DACA status at a young age. I could work and go to college. But I knew I had to walk on eggshells, because I didn't have anything guaranteed. My life turned upside down when I found out that the Trump administration was threatening DACA. I felt hated just because of my undocumented status and my skin color. It was the first time I felt unwanted in this country.

I started to view America as my home when I was in middle school. I joined the school's soccer team, made friends, started losing my accent, and my grades started improving. I was building relationships and friendships. I started placing my roots in American soil. I loved going to school and saw a future for myself in this country.

I came to the United States when I was only 3 years old. My father was the first one to touch American soil. My mother stayed in Mexico with my two sisters, my baby brother, and me. My father would work in the United States and send money back to my mother in Mexico.

My mother decided that she wanted our family to be together. We crossed the border with my mother, my 12-year-old sister, my 5-year-old sister, my 1-year-old brother and me. My father was waiting for us in the United States. When I finally saw my dad, I ran to him.

My adjustment to the United States was a series of phases. At first, it was difficult because of the language barrier. My parents spoke Spanish at home, and I was learning English at school. When I was younger, I held on strongly to the idea that I was going to go back to Mexico. During elementary school, it was difficult to keep up with the academic requirements, since English was my second language. I vividly remember being terrified of reading out loud in class, so I would go to the library to check out books and read out loud at night to improve my verbal skills. I focused so much of my energy on improving my English that I started forgetting my native language.

I was growing up with a culture and language that my parents did not understand, which created problems between my parents and me. For example, sleepovers are a common thing in the United States, but my parents never let me attend one. During middle school, my academics improved, and I felt more at home

in the United States. Problems at home increased when I was entering high school. My parents felt like they were losing their daughter to the American people and culture.

This created a toxic environment at home. My grades kept improving, and my interactions with teachers increased. During my junior year in high school, I took dual enrollment classes at my local community college. When my acceptance and scholarship letters started arriving, my parents didn't seem to care or believe in my future. I decided to take matters into my own hands and looked at the best options for my future. Community college felt like heaven; there was so much knowledge and a relaxed energy.

My English teacher during my junior year of high school made me believe in myself. With her help, I got a 23 ACT score and could take a Credit Court Course during my senior year. In addition, my ACT score gave me the opportunity to attend community college to finish my associate's degree with a full ride. I didn't have to pay for tuition, books, or fees. She was like my second mother that looked out for me when I wasn't following my path towards success. She talked so highly of me that I finally believed what she was saying. Now, with her continued support and TheDream.US, I am a junior at Dominican University and will continue to chase my dreams. Lastly, thanks to my immigrant parents that risked their lives and left their home for a better future for their children.

Junior Mares Ramirez, Dominican University

Degree: Computer Engineering

Hometown: West Chicago, IL

Age of Arrival: 3 years

Applying to colleges was a stressful yet satisfying experience. I was nervous about where I would end up, and, since I'm a first-generation college student, I was the first of my family to go through this process. When I started getting accepted to my top-choice schools, I felt on top of the world and knew I had done well. I'm excited to attend Dominican University, as its generous financial aid will help my family a lot, and plus it's close to home with a beautiful campus. The moment when I signed my enrollment form was my parents' happiest and proudest moment, and I will always remember the look on their faces.

If it weren't for DACA or the aid of TheDream.US, instead of going to Dominican University, I would be working in a warehouse like my parents, possibly lifting heavy boxes, living a life full of labor so that my children to grow up better, just like my parents have done for me. I'm hoping my education can take me somewhere further than working paycheck-to-paycheck, and I ultimately want to provide and give back that to my parents, as well.

My advice to high schoolers going through a similar process? Don't give up. Keep trying and keep looking for opportunities, because we're shaping a future generation with more opportunities than there was laid out for us. At Dominican University, I am going to show everyone who has doubted me and everyone who doesn't agree with immigration, and all of its components, why I matter and why I plan to stay.

Growing up, I watched my parents work incredibly hard, day in and day out, at a warehouse with other immigrants to provide us with a better life. Their hard work inspired me to do well in school. I owe my knowledge of the English language to days spent listening to the characters of Sesame Street, and over time I picked on English words and phrases. Thanks to the show, I didn't need to take any English classes when I started school in America, and I made a lot of native-English speaking friends, because it wasn't hard for me to communicate with them.

In high school, I met my mentor, my old band director. When I first met him, I was admittedly not the best band student, and I needed a lot of work and practice. He taught me everything I needed to know to be successful, not only in band, but also in life. I wouldn't be on the successful path that I am on now without his mentorship.

I didn't know that I was undocumented until I found my birth certificate and passport one day when I was sorting papers in middle school. Feeling confused, I asked my parents what those all meant, and they confirmed that I was still a Mexican citizen. While I was confused at first, I believe it has only made me stronger and has positively defined me. As the years passed by and I learned more about America's immigration issues, such as DACA, I became more aware of my culture and the land I live in. Even though America is my home, I am proud of who I am and where I come from.

I was three years old when my family moved to the United States from Mexico. I don't remember the car ride across the border, and I hardly remember the first home we lived in. Since that move, I've lived here in America, and I wouldn't consider anywhere else my home. I belong here, and thanks to the help of DACA and TheDream.US, I am so excited to be a freshman at Dominican University.

Carlos Benitez, Dominican University

Degree: Psychology

Hometown: Chicago, IL

Age of Arrival: 4 years old

I think that DREAMers provide a unique view of life in America. Most of us have struggled, in a sense, and have very important experiences to bring forward to better our society. We are hard-working individuals who have so much to give. We just need the opportunity to do so.

I always knew I was undocumented. My parents never hid it from me; they believed that it would always shape my identity, and to ignore it would mean undermining the struggles of our family. I think that growing up with this in mind allowed me to claim ownership of my own success, aspirations, and identity as a new American. America has always been my home because everything I know and love is here.

I remember arriving in Chicago in the end of winter when I was four years old— snow was on the ground, a chill was in the air. It was wildly different from anything I had experienced in Mexico. Despite the adjustment to cold weather, I mostly had a normal childhood. I had a lot of friends around the block, I worked hard at school, and I did my chores. Although, I did have a lot of anxiety growing up. I was fearful that something would happen to my parents, or that I wouldn't be able to help support my family. I saw the long hours my mother had to work to support us, and I feared she would somehow get hurt. My teachers and my peers were essential support systems as I got older. My teachers encouraged me throughout the years, validated me as a person, and fueled my desire to accomplish big things. Many of my teachers knew of my immigration status, and they assured me that I would be able to succeed despite any adversity.

In high school, I also found support amongst my peers. I joined, and eventually led, an LGBT group at my school, called SAGA, whose purpose is to educate students and provide support to queer youth. We openly advocated for queer rights at school and participated in events throughout the city of Chicago. I was also part of the Army JROTC at my school and was the student commander of the program my junior year and chief advisor the year after. As a senior, I frequently volunteered as an activity leader at a community shelter near the school where I led art therapy sessions for the residents. In my last year of high school, I was also a founder of the DREAMers Club at my school and have kept open communication with the younger students.

I want to use my education and experiences to create an outreach program for high school and middle school queer students to ensure they have resources and people they can trust and communicate with so they never feel alone. Additionally, I plan on keeping an open connection with my old school, and as many undocumented students as possible, to make sure they have the information they need to be able to go to college. I want to tell them: Be proud of yourself. Be proud of who you are and what you've accomplished. Know that no one can take that away from you.

On a personal level, I hope my love and enthusiasm for education will encourage my older brother and sister to go back to school and inspire my little sister and nephews to take advantage of the opportunities they have. I believe it is inhumane to take away anyone's access to education or make a living -- we are all just doing our best to get by.

“Carla,” National Louis University

Degree: Business Management

Hometown: Chicago, IL

Age of Arrival: 7 years old

I was just 7 years old when I came to the United States and I have lived here ever since. Coming to America felt very lonely to me, and I struggled with anxiety during my first few months here. There were many things I didn't understand. It was really hard not having any other relatives here apart from my parents. Even though I had made friends, I found it hard to be accepted by others because of the language and cultural differences between Mexicans and Americans.

My parents and I came on a tourist visa but we overstayed. My dad was offered a business venture by a friend to help run a travel agency. However, my dad was scammed and was left with the failing business which cost my parents a lot of money. Our family was fortunate enough to have charitable friends who helped feed us and look after us until we had enough money to get by on our own.

I first realised the repercussions of being undocumented when I was in high school. I had completed my drivers education but I could not apply for a drivers license because I had no social security number.

However, having the TheDream.US scholarship enabled me to finish my degree in Business Management. It was very rewarding. Even though I was an adult and had many responsibilities of my own, I realised that I can achieve whatever I set my heart to with the love and support of my friends and family. Most important, I discovered a support community within my college and not only did they offer me advice, they also made me feel like I mattered.

During my time at college, I did really well – I graduated with a 4.0 GPA. In the future, I would love to be a successful entrepreneur and own my own restaurant group.

I currently work for Venmo, which is a free digital wallet that lets you make and share payments with friends, as a Technical Support Specialist. I feel like my college education is benefiting now because I have more opportunities to apply to mid-level management roles straight away rather than starting from an entry-level position and working my way up.

DACA really did change my life for the better. It allowed to do so many things – get a state ID, apply for better jobs with better pay and allow me to seek proper benefits to help my family out more. Most importantly, DACA made me feel like a human. That's what mattered most of all. DREAMers also needs to be protected as much as possible – families, employers and communities are all affected by it. DREAMers contribute to the American economy and are individually vetted by the U.S government. They just want the opportunity to thrive in the country they have grown up in and be ambassadors for the American Dream.

For anyone thinking of applying for TheDream.US scholarship, do it! Make best of the scholarship and utilize all the resources given to you. I would also recommend getting involved with the support system within the scholarship community. Thanks to TheDream.US scholarship, I achieved my bachelors degree. I'm eternally grateful to TheDream.US!

Jacqueline Luna Chavez, Northeastern Illinois University

Degree: Elementary Education

Hometown: Chicago, IL

Age of Arrival: 2 years old

It was hard to see any Hispanics in positions of power growing up. That is one of the main reasons I want to become a middle school teacher. I would provide the prime example of success to the younger Hispanic community.

After I graduate, I plan on working in underprivileged middle schools in Chicago to inspire girls and Hispanics to join the STEM field. I am planning on teaching middle school math or science in underfunded schools. I believe that I will make the most impact there. My goal is to graduate from NEIU with a Bachelors in Elementary Education and a Minor in Math and Science Concepts.

My parents both got their Bachelor's degrees in Mexico. My dad got his in Mechanical Engineering. My mom got her Bachelors in Nursing. When they moved to the United States, my dad had to work in an entry level job because his degree was not valid in the U.S. Meanwhile, my mom decided to raise my siblings and me. Currently, my dad strives to provide everything that my family needs. My goal is to be a role model for my younger twin sisters by showing them that they can achieve their goals by working hard to attain them no matter the circumstances.

Providing support to DREAMers helps all communities get stronger. DACA was good for all of us because it provided a safe way for students to work and gain an education without the worry of being deported. All the DREAMers that are receiving support and gaining an education will be able to give back to their communities, which ultimately impacts the society as a whole. Myself and other DREAMers will be able to give the younger generations hope that they can overcome any obstacles that block their paths. We need to support all undocumented individuals because undocumented immigrants contribute to the society in many ways.

Noemi Luna, Northeastern Illinois University

Degree: Psychology

Age of Arrival: 2.5 years

Sitting on a bus one day in high school, I looked around and wondered about the life of each person. Just the day before I had won first place in a cross-country race for my high school. I felt special. I knew that no one on that bus knew my story. No one knew what I had gone through to be where I was and to get first place. Then, I realized, I didn't know anyone else in that bus. I didn't know their stories. I could've been sitting next to a veteran. I could've been sitting next to a previous chess champion or even the CEO of an important company.

Using this example for DREAMers, I imagined a bus full of undocumented students. We don't know their stories, and we also don't know their capabilities. One of them could be the next billionaire or the person to find a cure to cancer. Without higher education, these goals are limited. However, giving DREAMers higher education is a step towards helping these students better our societies.

America is all that I have ever known. Growing up here has been a true blessing. We have always had a roof over our heads and food on the table. It has truly been the land of opportunity, and I genuinely believe that, despite the difficulties my family has faced.

There are seven people in our family. My mother and father were both born in Mexico and received bachelor's degrees. My mother went on to be a nurse, and my father a mechanical engineer. They moved to the United States 20 years ago and are currently undocumented and working in other jobs. I was two-and-a-half years old when we came to this country - some of my early memories are of the seven of us living in a three bedroom apartment. Even though we were tight, we were hopeful that better days were ahead.

When I was a sophomore in high school, my older brother was a senior. He was applying to top colleges. One day, he was told that no matter how hard he tried, he would not be able to make it. It was those words that caused him to stop caring and trying. When I asked why, I was told that he was undocumented. "What does that mean?" I asked. The only response was, "So are you."

Prior to receiving TheDream.US, I decided to attend Northeastern Illinois, unsure of how I would pay for it. One day, I was scrolling through my emails, reading about events that I would be unable to attend because of homework and work. But one caught my eye. It said "Informational Session for Scholarship for DREAMers." Upon reading it I noticed that I would qualify for the scholarship. Right away, I called my sister, and we attended the meeting. Without TheDream.US, I am sure that I would still be working long hours with my father, earning minimum wage. As a student, I work full-time at a local charter high school as an Administrative Assistant. It fills my heart with joy watching students come to the program, grow, and graduate. It fills me with so much hope for my own future.

To other DREAMers I would say: You're being given the chance of a lifetime, take full advantage of it and change the world. "Start strong, finish stronger," as The University of Chicago Collegiate Scholars Program would say. Losing DACA would mean losing everything I have worked towards since I arrived here. My goal is to continue to help my community and students. I aspire to become a psychologist or engineer and help people solve problems that seem hopeless, but in reality, just need some extra attention, hope, and hard work.

Jose Castro, University of Illinois at Chicago

Degree: Criminology

Hometown: Chicago, IL

Age of Arrival: 14 years old

I plan to volunteer with organizations that advocate and provide resources for fatherless children, particularly young men who are looking for inspiration to succeed and keep fighting, like I was. One day, I would love to start an organization that helps equip men with the spiritual, emotional and physical tools they need to help their communities.

I arrived in the United States when I was 14. I remember feeling as though it was a different world. Everything was so neat and orderly compared to life in Mexico. I grew up in a single-mother household. In Mexico, my mother ran a successful clothing business, but then a family betrayal stripped her from all ownership of her business; after such heartache it was difficult for her to find good opportunities that would provide for the family. To forget about such heartbreak and to start fresh she immigrated to Mesa, Arizona so that she could have a better chance at providing for me. A year later I joined her.

As a teenager, I got caught up in the wrong crowd, but my mother's words always rang in the back of my head, and eventually brought me back to my roots: "Mijo you're different, you don't belong with the people you hang with, you're better than that. You are destined for greatness." I am so grateful that by the grace of God, I found the wisdom and discernment to break from that crowd and forge a path of better choices.

With DACA and TheDream.US, I have been able to tap into these passions without hiding in the shadows. I am studying Criminology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and have truly enjoyed my criminal justice and psychology courses. I plan to use my education as a stepping stone to obtain a career within the government because I feel the Hispanic community needs more people in positions of authority.

My greatest desire is to become the man God wants me to be, because I know that means serving my family and my community to make a lasting change for the better. I have to leave this earth knowing I made a difference in the lives of others.

Where DREAMers are, things are getting better. We have faced adversity and are resilient and hungry for opportunities to make this nation better. I'd like to tell DREAMers: don't take your foot off the gas--keep striving and bettering yourselves and your communities.

“Juana,” Nevada State College

Degree: Nursing

Hometown: Las Vegas, NV

Age of Arrival: 7 years old

It feels funny sharing my story because I've always flown under the radar when it comes to discussing my immigration status. I've never felt like anyone cared about my story, but it feels worth sharing in this scary time for DREAMers.

DACA has given me a sense of safety - the security I needed to chase my dream in this country - and TheDream.US scholarship has provided me with the financial resources necessary to pursue a college education. Both of these forms of assistance make me feel safe and equal to my peers - like I have an equal shot at success. I'm not sure what I would do if this sense of security was fully taken away from me.

No one deserves to live in fear. And everyone deserves the chance at an education.

As a child, I remember living with my grandmother in Mexico. My mother would work all day, beginning early in the morning, and so I would not see her until very late at night, if at all. My father had already moved to the United States in pursuit of his American Dream. It was a lonely start to life, but my grandmother and I were very close.

When I was seven years old, I moved to the United States. My father was already working in construction at the time. My mother and I would go to the streets and to restaurants to sell necklaces to make money, and my oldest sister would stay home to take care of my younger siblings. There are six children in my family in total: five girls and one boy.

When I was eleven years old, my father was diagnosed with and shortly after died from sarcoma cancer. My life has never been the same. The seven of us had to move in with my aunt, and all live in one room because we could no longer afford to stay where we were living at the time with the help of my father's construction pay. It was a really hard time for all of us, and required a lot of sacrifice.

For the most part, I didn't feel different from my friends and peers because, for most of my childhood, I did not know I was undocumented. Elementary school was difficult because I did not understand the language, but I made friends who spoke Spanish as I got older, particularly in middle school. We lived in a community where there was a large amount of Spanish speakers and students, which was helpful for my adjustment. However, I found out I was undocumented during my sophomore year of high school when I began researching scholarship options for college admission. At this time, I started to feel different, like maybe I don't belong in this country after all.

This didn't deter me from getting involved in my community though. I've volunteered with the American Red Cross since freshman year of high school and I'm also involved with the Student Organization of Latinos, Mu Alpha Theta Math Club, and a non-profit leadership organization called Leaders in Training. I've also completed three different internships at Veteran's Home, ATI Physical Therapy, and Sunrise Hospital.

As a member of the Nevada State College class of 2021, I hope to graduate with a nursing degree, and use the healthcare experience I've gained through my internships and will gain through my coursework to continue to give back and help out disadvantaged populations of people.

In addition to pursuing a nursing career, I plan to give back to my community by helping undocumented students and first-generation students apply to and attend college. I want to inspire these kids to not only make it a goal to go to college, but to graduate from college and pursue the career track of their dreams, because everyone deserves that. I plan to continue to volunteer with Leaders in Training because this organization has equipped me with the skills and knowledge necessary to be a leader and inspire others to work hard and change their lives.

Even though the last election cycle has ushered in a fearful time for undocumented people, there is no doubt in my mind that America is my home. In fact, it is the only one I've ever known and I have grown up with the desire to seize every opportunity this country has offered me, and to give back to make it even stronger.

Erik Cruz Morales, Rutgers University-Newark

Degree: Public Administration & Nonprofit Management

Hometown: Teaneck, NJ

Age of Arrival: 8 years old

I feel that Dreamers are as American as all citizens in the country. We contribute, we work, we create, we employ, we serve, we are visionaries, we are more than just dreamers.

We stand for equality, and for basic human rights and we pride ourselves in being part of this great nation. We are more civically engaged than most folks; we care about the issues affecting our communities. And a significant percentage of us go to school, receive higher education and want to make a difference in the country.

That is just one reason it is so terrifying, and very frustrating, seeing that nothing is getting done to resolve DACA, which allows me to drive and work legally in the U.S.

It always has been a sacrifice, and until this day it continues to be a sacrifice, to be an immigrant in this country. I came here at age eight with my two twin sisters, who were just three years old, and my mother. My adjustment here was tough, it was a complete change – different language, different food, different culture.

Being a TheDream.US Scholar changed my life completely. It gave me the opportunity to attend college, and from there to have more opportunities to follow my dreams. Next Spring I will graduate with my Masters after I received a grad school scholarship from my undergraduate university, Rutgers. I also work full time while pursuing my Master's degree. After grad school, I'd like to go to law school, then work for the government and maybe even run for political office someday.

My college experience provided me with great opportunities and a very supportive environment that actively helped the immigrant community. I graduated with a degree in Public Administration & Nonprofit Management with a 3.89 GPA. I've been involved with the campus group for Dreamers, the political science honors society, and other organizations on campus. I've also already put my degree into practice through a series of internships – at the American Civil Liberties Union of NJ, with a local Assemblyman, and with the district office of a New Jersey Member of Congress.

I'd like to tell younger Dreamers to never give up and to know that there are always people who will be supporting you in the college journey. It is very easy to lose focus and get discouraged, but nothing in life is linear. Stay focused and know that you can make it. Work hard and things will come.

I have two younger twin sisters that just graduated from high school and are inspired, motivated and ready to make an impact, in college and in my community. I know that their story, and the younger generation's, is just beginning

Yossy, Rutgers University-Newark

Degree: Accounting

Hometown: New Jersey

Age of Arrival: 2 years old

When me and my parents first came to America from Peru, I saw my parents struggle financially. I remember their frustration, but more evident was their determination, and their insistence on making my childhood great no matter how many obstacles they had to face.

One of our first Christmases here, I remember that they only had about \$15 to spend on my gift. Although they wanted to get me a big gift, the money was just not there. Instead, they went to the dollar store and bought as many one-dollar gifts as they could afford, wrapped them, and made my Christmas morning incredibly special since I had about 10 presents to open!

After being naïve about immigration issues throughout my childhood, I found out that I was undocumented in middle school. My friends would joke about “la migra,” but I did not know what they were referring to. For the most part, though, I did not face the turmoil of being undocumented until my junior year of high school. I could not apply to certain programs and scholarships simply because of my status. Like my parents when they arrived in the United States, I was frustrated, but my frustration was countered with determination and I determined to prove to others that I am more than a legal status.

Thanks to DACA and TheDream.US, I could afford attending Rutgers-Newark where I am studying accounting. I am beyond thankful for my experiences there and enjoy the diversity of the campus. I am currently the vice-president of the Honors College Student Council, a fellow of America Needs You-NJ, and serve as treasurer of RUDreamers, a campus club for undocumented students and allies. This summer, I interned at one of the Big 4 accounting firms, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and was extended a return offer as a tax intern this coming summer! I have also started a small mentoring program for undocumented students in my hometown to help mobilize them on their journey to college.

I want other DREAMers to know that they are not defined by their status, and should not feel held back because of it. They can excel and change the world if they set their minds to it. Also, never forget where you came from, instead, pay it forward to others just as people have helped you.

Personally, I want to continue to mentor younger, first-generation college students on their journeys to success and encourage them to not give up. Professionally, I would love to work as a tax accountant or an auditor at a Big 4 firm after graduation. Without DACA and TheDream.US, these goals would have been mere fantasies but with them, my dreams have taken flight.

Luis, Western Oregon University

Degree: Computer Science

Hometown: Boardman, Oregon

Age of Arrival: 3 years old

I am a first generation college student and the second to graduate from high school. Last spring, I graduated from high school and from an associate's degree program. The persistence I learned from my parents and my school counselor allowed me to achieve my goal of finishing community college while attending high school.

My counselor told me about TheDream.US without which I would not be able to afford Western Oregon University. My goal for this next chapter in life is to build connections and relationships with people that will be great friends in the future. Most importantly, I want to obtain a degree and make my mother proud. To anyone considering applying for TheDream.US, I would encourage them to do so, and I would tell them that anything is possible. Just keep gripping onto your dreams and never let go!

With my education, I want to build connections with business and political leaders, so one day I can start my own competitive business. I am very grateful for the opportunities TheDream.US has given me, although the fear of being an undocumented citizen still gives me a great deal of anxiety. If I were to lose my status, I would no longer have access to a life sustaining job. Given my state of current uncertainty, it is extremely important that I graduate college. I don't want to live a life full obstacles working in the fields. My parents envisioned a great future for us, and I plan on making that a reality. I know that I will take my education and make a difference in America. I am a determined and hardworking individual who is willing to fight and die for what I love: my friends, my family, and the United States, my home.

When I was three years old, my mom, dad, sister and I immigrated to Oregon. My mom and dad had to leave their families in Mexico in the hopes of building something better for us, their children. They grew up extremely poor, and unwilling to commit us to a similar life, they decided to come to the United States. Both of my parents are undocumented, and my sister and I have been blessed with DACA. My youngest sister was born in the United States. Both of my parents are employed as labor workers, cleaning fields.

Throughout my childhood, it is difficult seeing my parents wake up at 3 in the morning every single day to go to work. But, it really broke my heart, to see my parents scorned for not being able to speak English. Despite the hardships for my family, I still consider America to be my home.

“Gaby,” Western Oregon University

Degree: Education

Hometown: Salem, Oregon

Age of Arrival: 2 years old

I was only two when we came to the United States, but my older sisters have told me about our journey. My parents told us we had to split up, so my sisters went first and I followed. We reunited at my aunt’s house in Los Angeles. Growing up in America I never had any issues. My family and friends made the adjustment easy. In fourth grade, my parents explained our status to me. After that, I began noticing that I was ineligible for some opportunities. I couldn’t travel or apply for scholarships.

My parents never finished school - my dad only went up to fourth grade, and my mom to sixth grade. Two of my sisters are nurses. One is enrolled in a dental hygienist program, and my brother is about to start sixth grade. This fall, thanks to DACA and TheDream.US, I’ll start classes at Western Oregon University as a junior, after two years of community college. DACA gave me the opportunity to further my education, get a job, a driver’s license, and peace of mind.

I am really anxious about losing my DACA status not just because I would be separated from my friends and family. There is no reason to be skeptical about DACA - this program is a necessity. It only helps people - immigrant children - and doesn’t hurt anyone.

Yuni, Western Oregon University

Degree: Nursing

Hometown: Wilder, Idaho

Age of Arrival: 1 year old

There are so many ways I want to give back to my community as soon as I graduate as a nurse. At first, I want to be a traveling nurse and help people all over America, and then eventually settle down and work in own my community. And then one day, if possible, I would like to go on a mission trip to my birth country and help people in my hometown. Not only would I be helping them but I would also be able to learn about my roots.

I am one-fifth of a mixed status family: My dad and mom don't have legal status; I am a DACA-recipient; and my 15-year-old brother and 12-year-old sister are American citizens. I am the first in my family to go on to college, with the support and encouragement of both of my parents.

When we first arrived in the United States, we stayed in a trailer park with my dad's brother in Idaho. My dad was determined to give my mother and I a better life. Eventually he got the idea to build a taco truck, and it was up to me to learn all the materials that he needed to purchase. I remember telling him: "Dad, I don't know what this is!" and "This is too hard for me to understand!" And all he said in response was, "I'm sorry mija but I need you to learn this," Now that I am older I'm grateful. Those situations taught me invaluable knowledge.

My dad works as a milker at a dairy. He only stayed in school through second grade back in Mexico, because his parents wanted him to work instead. My mother still owns the taco stand that my father built for her. She has been running the stand for almost 14 years now. Although she struggles with her health, every day she wakes up with a smile ready for work. I admire her greatly.

As I got older, I started seeing how hard my parents worked and valuing their dedication. They came home really late from work, but they came home safe and sound in a city that we knew to be home. I know back in my birth country I wouldn't have grown up the way I've grown up here. And I'm just very thankful to be here.

I live in a Hispanic, rural, community. I love it because we all know one another, but I have also been able to travel to different parts of the U.S as a young adult representative to different conferences within the United Methodist church. My job was to be the voice for the youth within the United Methodist Church.

I began to view America as home the moment I started school. I was a part of the community. Over the years I have been involved in cheerleading, volleyball, track, academic decathlon, and I was the president of the youth group in my church. America has helped me become who I am today and, by the love of God, I've been able to fulfill so many of my dreams here.

Higher education for DREAMers is critical because our voices need to be heard. We have so much to give and we can contribute so much more to this country. I want my fellow DREAMers to never be scared and to apply for these scholarships. Anything is possible, all you need is a vision and a lot of faith.

“Susie,” Christian Brothers University

Degree: Computer Science

Hometown: Illinois & Georgia

Age of Arrival: 4 years old

During my sophomore year of high school, my older brother began the arduous process of college applications. He'd dreamed of studying aerospace engineering and was a member of the gifted program in school. But, he had a very difficult time receiving financial aid without a social security number and was ultimately unable to attend, despite his brilliant academic performance. That's when I realized both the importance of higher education and that my family was undocumented.

I am currently studying Computer Science at Christian Brothers University. Both of my parents graduated college before migrating to the US, but I will be the first of my three siblings to attend university, all thanks to TheDream.US Scholarship. I heard about the scholarship through a social media post on the account Humans of New York. My goal at CBU is to earn a quality education and gain as much experience as I can. I also look forward to engaging with the community in and around campus, and doing all that I can to bring awareness to the issues that face undocumented students.

I came to the US when I was 4 years old. I remember my mother was stressed out about getting the money to obtain visas for us to join my father in Chicago, and I remember the long plane ride and our layover in Germany.

The move was fairly easy for me, because we had some family here. My older cousin taught me how to speak English the summer before kindergarten, and I quickly made friends. Throughout our childhood, my mother always encouraged us to do well in school, go to church, and engage in our community. I never really felt alienated by my peers, even though my family had different traditions and customs, food, and could even speak a different language. I am very grateful for that. America always felt like home. Unfortunately, I don't have much of a recollection of my home country and still struggle to speak my home country's language.

I would encourage people who are skeptical about the need for DACA to broaden their awareness about our current immigration system and invite them to think about all of the rights and privileges that they may take for granted. I used to be really apprehensive about sharing my story but realized that the easiest way to get someone to empathize with immigrants is by giving them the opportunity to get to know one.

Giovanny Martinez, Christian Brothers University

Degree: Biochemistry

Hometown: Bossier City, Louisiana

Age of Arrival: 6 months old

“If you ever want to see your father, you need to start behaving and stop giving your mother a hard time.”

“Yes, sir.”

That’s the only conversation I remember from our trip from Guatemala to Louisiana, where we were reunited with my dad. I was six, my brother only four. We were travelling with my mom and a family friend - the travel guide who encouraged me to behave. On October 5th, my brother’s fifth birthday, we arrived in Louisiana. My dad was waiting, a cake in one hand and a gift in the other.

America has always been home. As a kid, I didn’t know anything about immigration status. I just knew our family had moved to a place where the language and culture was different. It’s still home.

My parents have always done their best to provide me, my brother, and now our younger sister, with the materials to succeed. They work long hours to support the family -- often my dad is gone most of the day working at different jobs. He leaves early in the morning and returns late at night. He often takes side jobs at night to earn more money. My mom, on the other hand, we see a bit more. She is self-employed and cleans houses to help support our family. She knows English a bit better than my dad, because she had a scholarship to study in the U.S. as a teen. Despite the American-earned associate’s degree, she still can’t obtain a high paying job because of her immigration status.

My brother and I, despite sharing a similar story, are complete opposites. We both like sports, but we’re pretty competitive with each other. I learn by reading, he learns with his hands. God blessed my little sister with a beautiful voice. She sings for our family, our church, and community events.

As a first-generation college student, I must do more than my best to excel in order to help my parents, so that they won’t struggle.

In middle school, my parents told me I was undocumented. It didn’t really affect me until high school - when I learned what “undocumented” really meant. Now, I work to protect my little brother from the hardship, and my little sister from the truth of her family’s situational risks.

Throughout high school, I was really busy – I played football, soccer, and ran track and cross country; I was a member of student council and a member of Students 2 Students - a program that helped new students acclimate to the school; and, for a year-and-a-half, I worked 30 hours a week to help provide for my family.

Junior year of high school, I started searching for scholarships. I clicked on almost anything that mentioned DACA, undocumented students, or scholarships. Then, I found TheDream.US scholarship opportunity -- it changed my life.

Without the scholarship, I’d likely be attending community college and working. I’d have to work long hours just to attend part time. Now, after college graduation, I hope to attend medical school and become a doctor. Then, I plan to open a clinic in Central or South America and serve the community at affordable prices to make sure everyone has access to medical care.

TheDream.US scholarship, and higher education access in general, give DREAMers the opportunities to contribute to our country and to show everyone what we can achieve, when given the chance.

Saul, Christian Brothers University

Degree: Marketing

Hometown: Kennesaw, GA

Age of Arrival: 1 year old

DREAMers and undocumented immigrants are humans, and, as humans, we have a right to access a higher education, if we work for it. To my fellow DREAMers, don't let yourself be held back by fear of failure. It's hard to accept it, especially in a system built to hold you back, but we are destined for great things.

My older brother, thanks to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, was able to graduate college with a double major and become a middle school teacher. My little sister, a U.S. citizen and a brilliant little eighth grader, will, hopefully, face fewer obstacles.

My family came to Georgia on valid visas that we then overstayed. We should've sought asylum, but by the time my parents realized their mistake, the window had closed. My parents were bankers in Venezuela and had recently purchased their first home, when my father decided to visit the United States. Now, they scrub toilets and vacuum floors. To this day, my brother, sister, and I attend every important appointment with my parents to help them translate.

Migrating to the United States was the right decision for my family. I had access to opportunities and safety that I never would've had in Venezuela. But, it came with a hefty price tag. It's hard to imagine having your college degree revoked or discounted, but that was my parents' experience when they came to the United States. Despite being college educated and graduated, they were ineligible to use their educations for higher paying jobs because of their immigration status. Instead, they founded their own business and cleaned houses.

I grew up half American and half-Venezuelan, but in the end, I'm not truly either. I had to view my culture and heritage through a keyhole; I didn't have any family other than my immediate; and I was warned to do better and work harder than my American-born friends and to always, always be careful.

I'm American in all ways but legally. I was raised here since the first year of my life, and I've never even had the opportunity to visit my birth country. In eighth grade, my parents explained to me that we were undocumented, but I didn't comprehend the severity of the situation. Junior year of high school, I realized the weight of word. College was a faraway, unattainable dream. The odds were overwhelming stacked against me.

Then, President Obama introduced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DACA allowed me the access that my parents had been denied -- to better jobs, to a driver's license, and to continued education.

Most importantly, DACA qualified me for TheDream.US scholarship. A program that I originally heard about through Telemundo, during a DREAMer rally. I saw the DREAMers marching and protesting for their rights. I admired their spirit and fight for the rights of undocumented students - just like the civil rights movement.

Now, throughout college and after, I plan to continue that fight by volunteering at charity events to educate the unknowing masses about immigration and by giving back to TheDream.US -- a program that helped me overcome the many obstacles between me and a college degree.

Jandy Simental, El Centro College

Degree: Architecture

Hometown: Fort Worth, TX

Age of Arrival: 1 year old

I am so thankful for TheDream.US, not just for helping me, but for helping so many others like me. Without this organization, I wouldn't have access to these incredible educational opportunities. Opportunities that will change and better my life. Similarly, I wouldn't be where I am today without DACA. DACA gifted me a work permit and allowed me to achieve the teenage milestone of obtaining a driver's license, which I know many undocumented teens aren't able to do. Most importantly, I wouldn't be able to continue my education without the help of both DACA and TheDream.US.

I plan to study architecture, and I hope to design and build a new church for my community. Currently, members of my church congregate in a garage. The church is a major part of so many people's lives in our community, and it deserves a proper home.

As a child, I would spend my Sundays at my local Spanish church, and we spoke exclusively Spanish in my household. By the time I was ready for kindergarten, I knew little English, and it was hard for me to communicate and make friends at school. I was, however, lucky to attend an incredible elementary school with driven teachers, who helped me quickly learn the language and succeed in the classroom.

Growing up, my mother never tried to hide the truth – I've always known that I am undocumented. It's a part of my identity, and it has shaped who I am today. However, for my entire life, I've also considered the United States my home, and I wouldn't want to have grown up anywhere else.

My mother and I came to Texas when I was just a year old. She came over with few possessions, just a goal to make it to America with hopes of a better life. I am the oldest of three children, and, when I start school this fall, I will be my family's first generation college student.

Throughout high school, I flourished as an athlete. I played soccer, softball, basketball, and I ran on the cross country team. Not only was I active in sports, I was also part of the art club, National Honor Society and the Architecture Construction Program. Now, I am able to continue my studies and reach for my goals with the help of my past educators and The Dream.US.

My hope is that for anyone skeptical about the need for DACA to put themselves in our shoes. As someone who has been in the United States for my entire life and calls it home, it's terrifying to consider the possibility of living in a country that I don't know. I wouldn't ever want to leave my family behind, and I have so much to look forward to at college and beyond.

“Maria,” San Antonio College

Degree: Nursing

Age of Arrival: 3 years old

All DACA students want is to feel just a little more like America's child. When Donald Trump became president, I wrote him a letter with my story, explaining how terrified DACA students and immigrants all around America were. I'm still living in my story. Every day is a new page to this chapter in my life. I hope one day I can become a citizen of this country. I haven't given up, and I'm not going to anytime soon.

I remember watching “Spongebob” as a child of three, recently arrived in the U.S. from Mexico, and not fully being able to understand. My mom had just had my brother, and we were sharing a small apartment with my tia until we could afford a house for ourselves.

At a certain point, after some struggles and successes in America, I began to understand “Spongebob,” my teachers, and my classmates. I received DACA in 2016 and arrived at San Antonio College by way of TheDream.US. I plan to become a registered pediatric nurse.

Growing up as an undocumented student, I understand the patience and bravery that it takes to push through high school and receive higher education. I hope I get the chance to become a mentor to a group of undocumented students and to help them realize that the work is worth it.

I think one of the hardest parts of moving to the United States was that my parents had to give up their families and friends. They had to start over and do everything on their own: babysit, buy a home, clothe and feed their children, all in a country where they did not even understand the language. Eventually, they both attended school and started learning English.

In middle school, I wanted to go out of town for a school trip. My mom kept insisting I stop asking her. She kept repeating to me, "No tienes papeles mija". I did not understand what she meant until she finally explained and told me that I could not tell anyone. Around this time, I fell ill, and the doctors could not figure out what was wrong. I did not have insurance, and hospital bills were accumulating. During that time, I felt guilty for all that my parents had to pay on my behalf. Thankfully, I got well, but the image of my mom hunched over white envelopes with her brow furrowed is forever etched into my memory.

DACA, and higher education for DREAMers, brings comfort and opens door for us. It's a gift, and to some of us, it is a life saver.

Cristina Tovar Berumen, San Antonio College

Degree: Principles of Education

Hometown: San Antonio, TX

Age of Arrival: 5 years old

America truly became my home when it gave me the opportunity to educate myself — when it gave me an opportunity to strive for what I love. My culture and background will always be tied to Mexico, but America will always be my home. Nobody in my family has a degree and I want to be the first to get one. When I do, I will have achieved it not only for myself, but for my mom who has supported me through everything.

I came across the TheDream.US scholarship while researching for financial assistance for undocumented students. I'm currently working two jobs to help with expenses for my family and myself, so gaining this scholarship has gave me an opportunity to study without worrying financially.

I didn't realize I was undocumented until I was in the sixth grade. Teachers looked at me differently and asked me questions that they didn't ask others, which got me wondering about who I am, where I came from, and what made me different. Then I found out I was undocumented.

The most influential people on my journey so far are my mentors back in high school and my mom, and now I want to help others who are undocumented and help them understand what being undocumented is, and how they can take steps towards a good future. I kept my status a secret for years. But now I realize it is who I am, and when someone asks me I proudly tell them my story!

Growing up in America was hard at first. I did not know English, and because of the language barrier I ended up having to repeat Kindergarten. I had to learn the nuances of an entirely different culture. However, as the years passed I started to grow into the American ways and establish myself in my community.

Then things started to get harder again. My dad was an alcoholic so my mom left him. I was only in the 5th grade and it was difficult to not have both parents around, especially since my mom had to work multiple jobs to support five kids on her own.

I struggled personally in high school since I was undocumented, but I pushed myself hard and graduated in the top 3% of my class, ranked number 6 with a 4.0 GPA. I was a member of the National Honor Society for two years and the Spanish Honor Society for all four years of high school. My senior year I was the President of the Spanish Honor Society and the Vice-President of the Texas Association for Future Educators.

Outside of school, I played guitar, sang in the choir at church, and played club soccer. And at the age of 15 I also started to work in order to help my mom out with the bills. Juggling school and work made me appreciate everything my mom did for my siblings and me. I started to love school, knowing that with it, I could help change my family's life.

I have just started my first year in college. I'm studying education and plan to be a bilingual elementary teacher so I can help kids know what they want to be when they grow up. I will tell my students to strive for what they believe in. There might be obstacles along the way, but together, and with perseverance, we can rise above them.

Maria Valencia Ochoa, Texas A&M University – San Antonio

Degree: Biology and Nursing

Hometown: Houston, TX

Age of Arrival: 5 years old

I've always known that I want a career that helps people, but I never knew which career would be best for me. Now, I know that, as a nurse, I will be able to truly help my community. My goal is to obtain my bachelor's degree, work for a year to gain experience, and then obtain my master's to become a nurse anesthetist (CRNA). I want to buy my parents a house and give my mother the garden she's longed dreamed of. That is when I will know I made it in life, and that the sacrifices were worth it. Those dreams are impossible without college, and college wouldn't be possible without TheDream.US.

I've always struggle with my status and wished that I was a citizen so things would come easier for me. At times I even hated my own skin color and thought that I was never enough in this country. But now I am proud. I am proud that I was made from my parents struggles and that I was the first one from my family to complete high school and pursue a career. I am proud to be an undocumented student defying the stereotypes that America had for me. I am proud that I'll set the example for my siblings. But mostly I am thankful for my parents for working non-stop in order, so we could have a better life.

I was heavily involved throughout high school, because I knew it would help me get into college. I created a charity club to give back to our community, and we were able to donate to TELETON USA . I also joined a political club for girls my junior year of high school that educated me about the American government and the election going on. I started volunteering at an elderly shelter my sophomore year when I got my social security, since I needed it to volunteer there and I absolutely loved it. Those are three things that I'm most proud of, but I also joined the basketball team, the poetry club and did a week long program at NASA.

When I was little, I remember my dad being in the States. I was about to turn 6 when I came to the USA. My mom and I crossed the border - we walked through mountains. I was the only kid crossing - everyone else was an adult. There was this guy who helped my mom by carrying me most of the journey, since it was a long walk and I couldn't keep up. I remember almost being caught and hiding in bushes from ICE. When we made it across the border, there were houses, and I remember there was a dog barking at us, while we tried to hide. A woman yelled at us in a language I didn't recognize - English.

After a few days in a safe house in Arizona, we went to California with my aunt. After that, we came to Texas, where I was finally able to see my dad. My parents sacrificed their families, so I could grow up in the land of opportunities. I'm forever thankful for them both.

Growing up in America was a bit hard, since I had two cultures surrounding me. At times, I lost touch with my roots and my actual Mexican culture. Sometimes growing up in America I felt ashamed for being undocumented, seeing how other undocumented immigrants are viewed here and treated. It was hard, but I knew it was going to be worth it. If my parents sacrificed so much, the least I could do was adjust to this county.

“Julia,” Texas A&M University – San Antonio

Degree: Biology

Hometown: Texas

Age of Arrival: 2 years old

My parents, although they speak of all the great opportunities of the United States, cannot deny the fact that it came with a price. They came to this country to give me a better life, but at the cost of leaving theirs. It has always been my parents and their desire for me to succeed that has fueled my ambition to extend my education to achieve a better future.

At Texas A&M, I plan to study biology. Learning about something I love and getting the required is really important to me, as it will grant me a higher chance to make a change and give to my community. Everyone is different and has their own unique talents and skills to contribute to this country, but it shouldn't mean that they must be born in this country to contribute.

As a first generation college student, I had little to no assistance from my parents when it came to college. They wanted to help me, but their education ended with high school -- they didn't understand the process. I have no older siblings, but I do have a younger brother, who I hope will follow in my footsteps some day and remember to keep dreaming and realizing his goals.

Three years after we came to the United States, when I was about 5, my parents sat me down and explained to me that we were undocumented. Being so young, I didn't fully comprehend the weight of the situation or the hurdles and limits I would come to face. I've always seen America as my home, but recent events have challenged that perception. Nevertheless, remaining in America is crucial. It will provide me with an opportunity to create change through higher education and hardwork.

Not everyone has the same opportunities. DACA and TPS allow undocumented people to attempt to make a better future for themselves. Many students and everyday workers are able to contribute to society everyday under DACA and bring diversity and culture into a rapidly developing country.

My biggest fear about potentially losing my status is the loss of opportunity. I, alongside so many others, have worked so hard to get where we are. Without our status, we won't have the opportunity to prove what we can do.

Maria Gonzalez-Treviño, University of Houston

Degree: Political Science

Hometown: Magnolia, Texas

Age of Arrival: 7 years old

Even when I thought that many were against me, TheDream.US showed me that there was someone out there that believed in me.

My college education is preparing me for what's to come. My dream is to obtain a Juris of Jurisprudence degree in Law and work for a non-profit organization as an immigration attorney. Regardless of all the obstacles that life may throw at us, we will overcome them because our dreams are bigger and more powerful than any negativity that tries to come our way. Obtaining a college education, enabled by DACA, TheDream.US scholarship, among others, has empowered me to keep moving forward and making my family proud.

DACA gave me the opportunity to live a less fearful life. It has allowed me to work, apply for my driver's license to drive and obtain scholarships that would have otherwise been impossible without it. Politicians can take away my DACA status, but they will never take away my education or knowledge.

After graduating from High School, I went to Lone Star Community College, where I obtained a two year scholarship at their Honors College. I then transferred to the University of Houston and obtained my Bachelor of Science Degree majoring in Political Science with a minor in Honors Phronesis. During my time at the University, I was President for the Youth Empowerment Alliance, an organization that aims to help undocumented students in their transition to college and fight for our rights in a state and national level as an affiliate of United We Dream.

I was just a little girl when I came to America – I was only 7 years old. Coming to America at such a young age made things very difficult for me. I always knew I was undocumented. The culture, lifestyle, and, especially, the language all seemed strange to me, and it was very different than what I was used to in Mexico. I did not speak English and living in a mostly Anglo neighborhood made it really hard for me, especially at school.

I remember when I used to get home after a day at school and attempt to do my homework, I would just cry because I just didn't understand. Luckily, my neighbor was able to help with my homework assignments and still to this day I am forever grateful of them. The struggle of language at school taught me an invaluable lesson – to be a fighter and not a quitter. I was going to fight for the education that I wished for.

To anyone who is sceptical about the need to protect DREAMers legislation, I would say this - living in uncertainty is definitely NOT the American Dream. Living a life of uncertainty is not what we, or our parents brought us here for. How can thousands of lives be put in limbo for such a long time? Legislators and the President need to act immediately.

TheDream.US has given me the opportunity to keep my aspirations high and not let anyone stop me from achieving my dreams and aspirations. Do not be afraid to apply – by applying, you are one step closer to accomplishing your goals.

Alondra Gomez, University of Houston

Degree: Biology

Hometown: Houston, TX

Age of Arrival: 7 years old

Sometimes I feel that, in America, a 9-digit number determines how people treat you. That's one of the things that is stressful to me about the idea of losing DACA - I would no longer have a valid Social Security number, something that helps me feel somehow American. DACA also allowed me to access a driver's license, gain a work permit, and qualify for in-state tuition. And it gave me the security to feel somehow safe and not fearful when I heard harsh immigration laws being passed. It granted me the opportunity to feel normal and, most of all, to continue with my dreams of achieving higher education.

I first heard about The Dream.US scholarship through social media. On Instagram, I followed a page called 'Humans of New York' which portrays many people's stories. It shows a picture of them, a part of their story, and where they are currently residing. One day last year, I was scrolling through my Instagram and saw a story of a young woman who wrote that without the help of TheDream.US scholarship, she would not have been able to pay for her tuition. I googled the name of the scholarship, read about it, saw the requirements, and decided to apply.

Now, I want to get the best college experience that I can. I want to gain greater knowledge for my future career. I want to be able to do great in my classes and receive my Bachelor's Degree. I don't only want to focus on my school work, but also to be involved in different clubs and organizations.

Because of The Dream. US no person or law can take away my education and my degree. That's one reason I must give it my all to finish strong and graduate from the University of Houston. My future plans, after receiving a Bachelor's Degree in Biology, is to continue to further my education and apply for a Physician's Assistant program. I want to be able to help ill people and give back during this lifetime.

In the late 1990's and early 2000's, my dad was a policeman in Monterrey, Mexico. We had no economic problems due to his stable salary. But as the crime rate started increasing and the war between drug cartels started, my parents knew it was no longer safe for my dad to be a policeman. My father's brother persuaded him to think about the option of moving to America, or as Mexicans call it, "el otro lado". It was not an easy decision but my parents wanted the best education for us and, most importantly, a safe environment for us to grow up in. I was 7 years old when we came to America.

At first, growing up in America was a daily battle. I was trying to fit in with the American lifestyle but yet I wanted to keep my Mexican roots. Everything was new to me and not being able to speak the native language of this country held me back. After about four years in the United States, I started to consider it a home. My memories from Mexico were beginning to fade away slowly and I couldn't picture my family's faces clear anymore. I gave up on the idea of ever seeing them again. I told myself it would be less painful to stop holding onto hope of going back to Mexico.

But when my grandmother, who I considered my mother, died, I only felt anger. I was mad at my parents for bringing us to the U.S. and myself for allowing them. I was unable to say goodbye to the person I loved most in this world. Traveling back to Mexico meant there was no way of coming back again. At that point, we had already gotten used to our new home, family, friends, and the environment around us. My parents knew if we moved back to Mexico there would be no future for us. We sacrificed so much to come to this country, to adjust, and to live undocumented for years.

No one is to blame as to why we are in this country. Our parents are not criminals because they wanted us to have brighter opportunities. Just because we don't have the proper documents to be consider 'legal' in this country doesn't make us less of a human. No one knows the struggles people go through in life. But it is important to not give up hope. That is what I would like to leave with other Dreamers- never give up hope.

Christian Urrea Aguirre, University of Houston

Degree: Public Relations
Hometown: Aurora, IL
Age of Arrival: 8 years old

In the United States, I remember seeing all the room for opportunities. I struggled with the language the first fall I enrolled in classes, but I told myself that I could do it, so I'd go home after school each day and read English newspapers and books out loud to improve my language skills. In less than two years, I graduated from ESL (English as a Second Language) and was placed in English honors classes. Hard-work pays off.

I would tell potential Dream.US applicants not to ever give up. Hard work does really pay off. Despite the frightening costs of higher education, be fearless and shoot for your wildest dreams. You can do it!

I don't see myself anywhere without higher education. I remember how much my single mother's lack of higher education made her stumble with career barriers and how hard it was to put food on the table working side jobs which were awfully underpaid. I don't see myself anywhere without the endless opportunities my education has given me. A college degree is very important given my immigration status. I remember my professors promising me and every other student a world of opportunities, if we obtained higher education. A college degree provides a sense of stability and possibility of a future. I plan on using my Public Relations degree to highlight stories in the media for struggling groups of people, like refugees, immigrants, women and people of color.

My family came to the United States when I was eight years old. I remember leaving my hometown very unexpectedly. I never said goodbye to my family members or friends, because I was supposed to be back by the end of the summer. My mother overstayed her visa to give me the opportunity of a lifetime (higher education) that she never had, which in turn made her undocumented. She worked numerous side jobs including custodial work and babysitting to provide all the essentials we needed at home.

Throughout my freshman year, my mother began to show symptoms of dementia. Due to our lack of finances, we could never afford medical care. DACA allowed me to work three part time jobs to be able to afford a small portion of my mother's dementia costs, but it was too late. My mother's dementia quickly progressed and soon required 24/7 care, which I could not provide while attending college full time and simultaneously working a full-time job to afford our home expenses. My grandmother graciously offered to become my mother's caregiver while I finish my undergraduate degree. Due to the current administration's removal of Advanced Parole, the privilege to see my mother was taken away. I continue to financially provide for my mother and her dementia treatment costs despite her distance. My mother and I always had and continue to have the same vision for me; pursue the higher education she never had the privilege to obtain.

DACA completely changed my life and empowered me to use my education and resources to give back to our community. DACA allowed me to come out of the shadows and undergo a background check to show everyone that I was a good contributing member of society. It allowed me to become the head of the household and financially support my mother and me. It gave me the comfort of not having to hide from police officers, and it gave me the courage to advocate for the other 800,000+ DACA recipients through demonstrations and campaigns started by United We Dream.

Before and after her dementia, my mom was my guiding light. When I was younger, we would pack a lunch and bike to the public library every day. We'd read all morning, and then on our way home, we'd

stop at a splash park to cool off. I vividly remember a very hot and humid day after the park. We biked home, and I woke up on the floor. Apparently, I had fainted due to heat exhaustion, but I woke up to my mother crying and telling all the pedestrians and people that pulled over to check on us not to call the ambulance. She was scared a call could also dispatch a police officer and get us deported. This was the first time I realized that I was undocumented. The first time I realized the significance of that, I was in high school when I tried to obtain my driver's license, and they asked for a Social Security number that I didn't have.

Growing up in America was a bittersweet experience. I missed my close family members and their family traditions, but I also remember the endless opportunity that school provided for me, such as class resources, school field trips, tutoring, and eventually internships. I remember every holiday my mother and I would sit home alone and reminisce about our family that was back "home."

I began to view America as a home at a very young age, but especially when I realized both my mother and I were gridlocked in this country. We could not travel back "home" or to any other country, because we were to remain in America forever (or until we received some form of citizenship). Eventually I grew to appreciate what this country stands for, what our Constitution offers, and the true definition of the American dream that my mother and I were living.

Uzair Babar, University of Houston

Degree: Biology

Hometown: Sugar Land, TX

Age of Arrival: 5 months old

I have always thought of myself as an American — the U.S. is the only place I have ever called home. From my first day of pre-school to my college orientation this fall, I've been raised and educated right here in Houston. I've never even been outside of Texas, and the thought of leaving seems absurd.

I love being able to live the American dream, and I know it is all thanks to the sacrifice and hardship my parents have faced as undocumented immigrants. Both have had to work odd jobs to make ends meet and have dedicated all of their time, energy, and money towards providing for their four children so that we can be successful in life.

In July 1999, just five months after I was born, my mother, father, and I immigrated from Karachi, Pakistan to Houston, Texas. 18 years later I am about to start college as a proud first-generation college student, a DREAMer, and a Scholar.

My three younger siblings are all American citizens, but they understand the struggles of undocumented immigrants and support me and my parents in every way they can. I feel like I'm an American citizen just like them since Houston is all I have ever known. But I'm not. We have always hidden my status and my parents' undocumented status from our neighbors, friends, and colleagues.

My undocumented status really sank in as I got older, when I couldn't get regular documents like a Social Security Number, a driver's license, or a passport. As soon as I turned 16, I applied for DACA which would give me the opportunity to go to college and get a job. This may seem so simple for the average person, but when I received DREAMer status three years ago, everything changed. Now I am able to continue my education, pursue my dream to become a nurse, support my family, and give back to my community.

Today, DREAMers can contribute more than ever before to the classroom and to the workforce. And scholarships like TheDream.US help us access higher education, which helps form successful, engaged citizens and provides a sturdy foundation for the economy and our government.

I want to go into nursing because I have seen my parents struggle to afford medical costs. My siblings are all citizens and therefore had better access to health benefits, but, when I was sick, my parents had to pay an arm and a leg in order for me to see a doctor.

All throughout high school, I volunteered with the Red Cross. It made me passionate about working with the Houston community and caring for others. Although I have just started down my new path at college, I already plan to use my education and talents to help all people, especially people like my parents who don't always have the resources to afford the help they need.

Gabriela, University of North Texas Dallas

Degree: undeclared

Hometown: Grand Prarie, TX

Age of Arrival: 5 years old

Although my parents were only able to receive a grade school education in Mexico, today they own two small businesses. It has not been an easy journey for them due to their legal status, but they have continued to demonstrate to me and my siblings that one's status shouldn't define who they are.

I began to view the U.S. as home when the English language became second nature to me, when I adapted to my new school, and when the idea of returning to Mexico did not cross my mind anymore. I knew that if we returned, my sister and I would not receive a quality education and my family would struggle financially. By staying and working hard in this new home, we had a chance at stability and success.

There isn't a specific time that I realized I was undocumented, but I do recall asking my parents about going back to Mexico to visit my grandma, and they told me that we couldn't go because if we did, we wouldn't come back.

I received DACA when I was 16, and it has allowed me to work and attend college. DACA has allowed me to feel secure about living in the United States. I don't let myself think about what I would do if DACA was revoked and not replaced— all I know is I would find a way to continue my education and be there for my family.

Because of DACA, and opportunities like TheDream.US, there is hope for the undocumented community. Because of DACA/TPS, we are able to contribute to society by obtaining an education and joining the workforce. After college, I plan to have a stable job that allows me to help my community and other undocumented youth. I also hope I can provide for my family, and continue my education by attending graduate school.

I want my fellow undocumented students to know that we are not our legal status--it does not define us. With hard work, we all have the potential to be successful and contribute to this nation that is our home.

Ixel Acosta, University of North Texas at Dallas

Degree: Undeclared

Hometown: Dallas, TX

Age of Arrival: 6 years old

My eyes have not seen the rest of the world — Texas is all I have ever known. I used to fear that I had lost my roots and my identity. Recently, I've found rediscovered them, at home in the Lone Star state. I have been accepted and am attending the University of North Texas at Dallas, and I plan to study Business and Spanish. I will be the first in my family to attend college, and I aim to be the first college graduate as well. I have set goals that I am determined to accomplish.

Since the age of 6, I have lived in fear of deportation. All I have ever wanted was for this constant sense of fear to go away, and now, with DACA, I finally feel safe. In a perfect world, a law would be created that allows DACA students a pathway to citizenship. I have always thought that at the age of 18, any DACA qualified youth who has graduated from high school in good academic standing should be allowed to apply and obtain permanent citizenship in the United States.

I have two younger sisters who are American citizens. I am extremely grateful that they were born here, so they don't have to face the same fears and obstacles associated with being undocumented.

For most DREAMers, like me, the only country we have ever known is the United States. We have grown up "in the land of the free" and seek to pursue the American dream. We contribute to this country through our education and our taxes. America, this great country, has opened its doors for years to welcome those who been seeking better life opportunities.

America's foundation was built on immigration, differing cultures, and a blending and appreciation of values in support of one another. I aspire to be a full-fledged member of society, contributing positively to this great country while receiving the same benefits as any other American. I am an American- and I want to help make this country greater.

Marisol, University of North Texas at Dallas

Degree: Psychology

Hometown: Dallas, TX

Age of Arrival: 12 years old

I love the United States. When I first arrived with my family, in 2000, I was 12 about to turn 13. I remember seeing the American flag waving in the air. Somehow within me I knew this was home.

Within that first year, I became comfortable. I used to talk to cousins back in Mexico and they would ask and still ask, "Would you come back to live here?" And I would respond, no. I love the U.S. It's important for me to remain here because this is where I have grown up now more than half of my life. America is most of what I know. I have been influenced not only by the culture, but more specifically, by what our Pledge of Allegiance declares... "One Nation, Under God, Indivisible."

I am proud of my Mexican heritage, but I am also proud of calling the U.S. my home. I know how proud every American is for being an American, and I am proud of being here and feeling and counting myself as an American. When I'm at the ball game and hear the lyrics to "God bless America," I tear up. I truly pray the lyrics of the song as this is the nation I love and am so proud to call home, even though it has not been easy.

It wasn't until the last year in high school, when some of my friends began getting driver's licenses and applying for college, that I realized the true meaning of being undocumented and how that status affected my life. It was depressing, it made me sad, it made me scared, it made me feel inadequate, and it even made me feel undeserving. Still, I had no choice but to keep on going. When DACA came about, and I applied and got accepted, all those feelings faded, and a new hope was born.

DACA has given me peace of mind. Through it, I was able to get a more stable job, pay rent and buy my first vehicle to drive me to work. Not only that, but I was able to return to school through the provision of a scholarship. I plan to finish college and either work with a nonprofit that is targeted towards helping youth. Or, maybe I'll work at a high school and be a counselor. That's why I chose to major in psychology. I also want to continue volunteering with programs that mentor and help teens, especially girls. This is an issue dear to my heart.

DACA is important not just for us DREAMers but for America, as all benefit from allowing DREAMers into the workforce and providing service to the nation; a service that we feel privileged and honored to present. Since we are not natural born citizens of the United States, us DREAMers know that we are not entitled to anything that America provides. But, because of that truth, we strive and work hard to obtain what we desire by proving that we are trustworthy to carry the same allegiance to a nation that some were just naturally born into.

I don't want you to have pity on me, as it is difficult to try to understand and share what I have gone through, especially if you have never experienced it. All I ask is that you see me. See the potential in me. See the hope in me. See the passion in me. Allow the fruit of my success after DACA to be a key that influences the foundation of your decisions about it. Would you be compassionate? Would you be merciful? Would you be forgiving? Would you be kind? Would you be loving?

We need each other. United is the only way we, as Americans, will succeed. Give us a chance, let us show you that when we are given an opportunity, we make the most of it. Why? Because America was not given to us. We DREAMers must earn it, through our hard work.

It truly is a privilege to be able to be here and I am grateful to call America my home.

Elton, University of Texas at El Paso

Hometown: El Paso, TX

Degree: Computer Science

Age of Arrival: 8 months old

My mom has always made me aware of how important it is to do your best. As an immigrant, some people have lower expectations of us. She taught me how to break through the barriers of expectations and how to succeed – not just to prove people wrong, since immigrants do not have to prove themselves out of these prejudices, but because she knew what I was capable of.

My mother was only able to attend school in Mexico until she was about eight years old. Times were tough, and my grandfather couldn't afford for her and her sisters to continue their studies. So, as soon as she could, my mother decided our family would come to the United States to pursue a better life for all of us. Just like most people who come here, she wanted nothing but a limitless and bright future for her children.

For the past 18 years, she's worked tirelessly as a housekeeper to make our American lives possible. She works long days and full weeks to keep a roof over our heads. At one point my older sister had to drop out of high school to take care of me while my mom worked, but fortunately she has since been able to receive her GED. My brother was the first in our family to graduate from high school, and soon, I will be the first one in our family to graduate from college.

I was five years old when my mother tried her best to explain that I was undocumented. I remember asking her if we could travel to Disneyland, and she tried to explain why that was, at least for the time, impossible. Traveling across state lines was just one, among many other things, that would be too risky to do as an undocumented family. Although I was hit hard with the facts at an early age about what it was to be undocumented in America, I have still tried to live every day here as the best person that I can be. I learned English quickly, I studied hard in school, and I did everything in my power to be successful.

Over the years, friends, teachers, and professors have helped me to overcome barriers and contributed to my personal growth and education. I am extremely proud to have grown up with them by my side, and I am certain that without them my life would have had many more difficulties.

Now that I am in college, I am looking for ways to reach out and help anyone who does not have a support system. I want them to know that there are people out there who believe in them and can help them succeed. Given the opportunity, I'd tell fellow DREAMers and undocumented immigrants that in order to exceed your own expectations, you have to believe in yourself, and then, once you truly believe you're going to make big changes in the world, go out and do it!

Quite frankly, I have no idea where I would be if I wasn't in university and didn't have TheDream.US scholarship. I know that I would be struggling, but I can't imagine what I would be doing. I did not have alternate plans. I focused on getting into college and told myself not to focus on any other possible outcome.

College classes were tough at first. I felt lost and I was trying to find my way, but thanks to my support system, I have since found my path. My fellow DREAMers and TheDream.US team have been my biggest support system—I know that if I ever need help, all I have to do is reach out.

Calling the United States a home can be hard to do when there is still a very large number of people trying to get rid of you, your family, and your friends. We are often unwelcome here. Despite these obstacles, I know that this is my home, and it is my responsibility to make it a more welcoming place for future immigrants.

I greatly appreciate the incredible number of people who have welcomed my family into this community and helped us to establish our home here. I only wish that the country was as welcoming. Luckily for us, we don't just wish, we work.

Undocumented immigrants are just like everyone else when it comes to dreams. We all dream about our futures, about what we want in life. We have to start somewhere and then we work hard to get there. The difference lies in the opportunities provided to us. I think we deserve a chance to achieve our dreams. Many of us want to make changes, improve lives, and make this country a better place for everyone in it, just like any other American.

“Sofia,” The University of Texas at El Paso

Hometown: El Paso, TX

Degree: Mechanical Engineering

Age of Arrival: 7 years old

Like many children, I remember feeling disoriented, frustrated, and isolated at times. Being a kid isn't always easy and especially when you are adjusting to a new country.

I moved here from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico when I was 7 years old with my parents and twin brother. I had been going to school in Mexico for three or four years at that point, and when I began school in Texas, I could not understand a word anyone was saying. Once I knew we were staying in America, it was both a sad realization, but also the reason I started to view America as home. I also started to value and appreciate the fact that I was learning a variety of subjects and many different things that I probably would not have learned back in Mexico.

My parents are two of the most hard-working people I know. My mother has a Bachelor's Degree in Industrial Engineering, which she earned back in Ciudad Juarez. Unfortunately, she can't use her degree here, so she has two jobs: one in a Mexican restaurant and the other as a housekeeper. My father has his high school diploma and works two jobs, too, one in an office and the other doing welding jobs on the side. I have two brothers; one is 12 years old and the second one is my twin. Our younger brother is a U.S. citizen, and my twin and I are DACA beneficiaries.

Growing up, I kept my lack of papers to myself. By middle school, I had made a lot of friends. I played sports and joined the band and choir; my life just seemed like it was getting progressively easier. This is when I stopped feeling like I do not belong here.

My sense of belonging in this country grew even stronger through my high school years, since I was involved in several different extracurricular and community service activities. During my junior year at Clint Early College Academy - a non-traditional high school that enables its students to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and credits towards an Associate's Degree - I actually earned my Associate's.

Then, during my senior year, my advisors suggested I try to enroll at the University of Texas El Paso. I was excited at the possibility of doing so, but knew my parents would not be able to afford the tuition for my twin and I all at the same time. I began trying to save money working at a part-time job during my senior year, but receiving TheDream.US scholarship ultimately made my next move to University of Texas El Paso a reality.

I hope to first work towards my Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering and afterwards earn my Master's in Biomedical Engineering. With these skills and credentials, I plan to help out not only my family but other people in need. I would like to work for organizations involved in the engineering and production of prosthetics such as LIMBS International. I hope that by working there, I will be able to spread awareness in society about people who have been dealt an unlucky hand but are surviving.

Lastly, I hope that one day I get to be an inspiration for many other DACA students like me who are pursuing their higher education paths, trying to repay their parents for their sacrifices, and thankful to so many for the opportunities we now have.

Nancy Sanchez Duarte, University of Texas at El Paso

Hometown: El Paso, TX

Degree: Marketing

Age of Arrival: 1 year old

When I got TheDream.US scholarship, my mother cried and my sisters jumped around the house excitedly. I was silent for the moment, thinking back to the nights of my father working, running on little sleep, and my mother's fear compounded by financial woes. It was not only my dream come true, it was their dream come true.

I came to the United States when I just one year old. My dad worked two shifts per day, six days a week, while my mother and I stayed home in an unfamiliar place with an unfamiliar language.

But my parents always reminded me why we were here: so that I could have opportunities that they were never afforded, and maybe one day graduate college. I am the only undocumented child in my family. The reality of this sits like a stone in my stomach. A burden that, for a while, I had to bear alone and could not share with any of my siblings.

My third-grade teacher, Mrs. Gomez, played a pivotal role in my assimilation to the United States. She was patient as my lips learned the words and phonetics of the English language. With her, I didn't feel like an outsider or afraid because of my status.

In high school, I immersed myself in extracurricular activities and did well in my classes. But, with little financial assistance and without a proper immigration status, college still seemed like a distant goal. That's why my scholarship and the chance for a college education mean so much.

I am currently a sophomore at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), studying marketing. I am part of the Women in Business Association (WBA) and was part of the American Marketing Association (AMA), and I volunteered for the Susan G. Komen walk for breast cancer. I would love to combine my marketing education with my passion for geology to aid our planet's well-being and push people to become more reliant on renewable energy.

One day, I would love to start a scholarship foundation to give more undocumented students the chance to pursue their dreams and get a college degree. I believe that we should all be given the opportunity to further our education, regardless of immigration status.

My message to DREAMers is to never ever give up. Whenever you feel like things aren't going your way, remember that from our darkest days we learn valuable lessons, and those lessons are the key for a brighter day. No dream is too big for us and with perseverance, anything is possible.

Robert Gomez, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Degree: Computer Engineering

Hometown: Pharr, Texas

Age of Arrival: 3 or 4 years old

I am a first generation college student and pretty much the first to even finish high school in my whole extended family. My aunts, uncles, grandparents and my parents are undocumented and are hardworking and honest people, but it is very difficult to find jobs. I want to become a U.S. citizen and create revolutionary AI. I want to become a role model for everyone else in my family and especially my younger siblings. Attending college is very important to me because I grew up in the society where a degree means that all your dreams will come true. I want my degree to be able to work and feel accomplished and take my family out of its perpetual poverty.

I had very high hopes for attending an Ivy League or another high tier university because they are usually the most understanding for those of my situation. But unfortunately I was not admitted into any university of the sort, and the other universities I had in mind did not offer me enough financial aid for me attend. I chose to attend my local university because it offered me the financial aid that bigger schools did not. I am often mocked or ridiculed for being a top student yet ending up in the local university. The students have no idea of my troubles or why I was not eligible for a lot of financial aid or loans or scholarship opportunities. Overall I am grateful because at one point I seriously considered living and studying in Mexico. I convinced myself that it doesn't matter where I get my education as long as I use it correctly.

If I did not obtain a scholarship, I contemplated going to a vocational school but discarded that when I realized my mom wouldn't support me in that financially. My mother needs urgent financial support or relief and she has tried to force me into being a nurse or any vocational training that could help me support for the family but without a social security number I wouldn't be able to work. I strongly considered leaving the U.S. and my whole life behind and moving back to Mexico and starting a new life there. I also thought about shadowing my uncles and learning anything I could about being an underpaid mechanic to try it on my own.

My competitive mathematics coach played a big role in inspiring me to have ambitions, he prepared me to win the state championship and become the first ever state champion at my school. He, time and time again, demonstrated that I could succeed in life and overcome my obstacles. He is going to graduate from Harvard this semester with his master's degree in mathematics, and he is a giant inspiration to me and a great role model. He is so young yet so accomplished and so incredibly knowledgeable and intelligent that it makes me believe I could achieve the same level.

A few years ago, my father was deported for domestic abuse. He was drunk one night, and a panicked phone call was all it took to rip him out of our lives. My father would work as a carpenter, mechanic, electrician, construction worker, landscaper and just about anything he could do to provide for our family. Since my father's deportation, my mother had to start providing for the family, and it was very difficult for her. She had never had a job nor did she know how to drive nor did she know how to take care of any other head of household responsibilities. Since then my mother has cried over eviction notices and other unpaid bills, but we've prevailed and my mother now works as a maid at a small local hotel. All my siblings are American citizens. I am still undocumented.

I always knew I was born in Mexico, and I was even proud of it. I'd show off the scar I have on my upper right arm and think I was cool. Somewhere in middle school, I learned that I was born specifically in Reynosa, but I was still oblivious to what that meant. It wasn't until I started hearing talk of all the

horrible things that were happening to undocumented people that I realized I was one of those people. I was nearing the age when most kids learn to drive and get a license. I learned that I wouldn't be able to drive, to work, to travel, or to vote. Most recently, I was devastated that I am not eligible to receive federal financial aid.

I was around 3 or maybe 4 when my mom brought me here with a visitor visa, but my father crossed the river with a coyote. My mom once returned to Mexico for a family emergency and nearly died crossing the river to come back. The sacrifices are countless, my father left all of his family behind to try to start a better life for me and my mother. I remember a lot of going back to Mexico for visiting my cousins (up until my visitor visa expired) and a lot of financial difficulties, which still persist to this day. I remember living in a very small house we rented. I remember my parents not understanding English.

I learned Spanish at home but started school in the U.S. so I had to learn English. I was placed in classes with all the students who did not speak English. I quickly learned the language and was placed into an advanced class where I spoke English better than my classmates, who had English as their native language.

I quickly learned to be proud of my bilingual skills. I grew up and still am in a state of poverty, but I always thought it was normal until I visited a friend's house. I truly realized that we were poor. I saw so many financial luxuries that were considered trivial to my friends. I grew up in the American culture, in the American school system, in the American everything. I am proud of my heritage, but it is heartbreaking to not be accepted as American when I am just like everyone else. I am too American to connect to my Hispanic side but much too Hispanic to connect to my American side. I am stuck in a hell-like middle where I am looked down on by everyone. From my college experience I want to become a respected member of society and a poster boy example that being undocumented means only what you let it mean.

Mia Almazan, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Degree: Business Management

Hometown: Monte Alto, TX

Age of Arrival: 4 years old

The U.S. is the only home I've ever known. I know where I come from and I am not ashamed. I love my roots, customs, and traditions, but I learned to love this one too. I stood up every day in school and learned the National Anthem. I mourn the loss of the soldiers that fight for our freedom and respect their bravery. I hear about so many places where people aren't as lucky, and it reminds me of how lucky I am to be here. The Dream.US is a huge part of helping me continue these amazing traditions by helping me get an education and become an integrated member of society.

I want to work for a huge corporation after I graduate and obtain a stable job to provide for myself and my family. I want to be able to help my parents with their bills and other payments and then buy my own place. Eventually, I hope to become my own boss by establishing my own business. College by way of The Dream.US scholarship will help me make connections and create my own future.

No one in my family finished high school or went to college. My older sister, who is 23, and I are the only ones who have obtained a high school diploma. We are the first generation to go to college. My parents immigrated into this country when my siblings and I were really small. They have worked in the fields for years trying to provide for us, because, without papers, no one wants to hire them. They are hard working and loving parents.

Like many, my parents wanted a better life for their family. My parents left all our friends and family behind looking for something better, knowing no one in this new country. Once here, they looked for jobs but no one would hire them because they lacked papers and education. Someone offered my parents a job in the fields, and, though it was hard work with extremely harsh conditions, my parents knew it was the only way to provide for our family in the valley. They have worked there since.

As field workers, there are days when there is enough money, but, when the season is over, things get a little tough. We struggle trying to make ends meet. I have DACA, but if the program ends, I could lose my ability to go to school and achieve my dreams.

I was raised here since I can remember. I live in a household of seven with my mom, step-dad, grandmother, two sisters and one brother. Learning a new language wasn't really that difficult, because I was brought here at a very young age. I was always good at school and loved playing sports. Growing up, my school always took us to go see the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. I came to know the school inside and out. It was really close to home and I loved the campus. In high school, I started taking dual-enrollment classes and realized that most of my classes would transfer to this college.

I think this is my family's country too. I didn't ask to be brought here, but it happened, and I'm thankful because this country is amazing. DACA is an amazing program, because it allows everyone to win. Applicants are able to work here legally and the government gets money. We are able to pay taxes and everything. This programs allows undocumented people to do things right. Ending the program will not stop immigration, it will only cause it to be illegal. On the contrary, with DACA, the government can keep record of who we are but if it ends this will no longer be.

Cristina, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Degree: Biology

Hometown: Edinburg, TX

Age of Arrival: 3 years old

It's hard to contrast the harsh rhetoric of others, whether politician or member of the public, with what I know to be true. My parents worked hard and made tremendous sacrifices to live on this soil. Once they arrived, they contributed to our economy and social capital day in and day out. Even so, some want laws that would set my family back years, barring them for the life that they've poured blood, sweat, and countless tears into.

My mom still doesn't like to talk about our early experiences in this country much. After we arrived in the U.S., I remember sleeping on hardwood floors, shared houses, carpooling. We were lucky to have friends and family to help us. My parents saved money, and bought a home and a car by way of backbreaking work.

My parents still worry about being separated from us. Four of my younger siblings are U.S. citizens, so if my parents are deported, they'd be left to care for themselves. My 17-year-old brother will join me at University of Texas Rio Grande this fall. My 16-year-old sister plans to follow in our footsteps. Unlike us, she is a citizen.

If DACA is revoked and legislation for young immigrants is not passed, our family will be torn apart, but she'll still be here. The burden is different for her, but it's not any easier. Since that day at the bus stop, my family has been inseparable, leaning on one another when the odds were stacked against us. I want my siblings to feel courageous in the face of uncertainty, and yet, I often feel overwhelmed by the fear that my family may soon be fractured.

Through DACA, I became a certified Pharmacy Technician and an EMT. I also volunteer in my church - the more I can help to build community, the more support we all have.

I hope to one day become a general surgeon and provide medical care in third world countries. That day, I believe, will come, if I am able to continue my work and schooling in the United States.

Noadia Saint-Louis, George Mason University

Degree: Healthcare Administration & minor in Public Health

Hometown: Naples, FL

Age of Arrival: 12 years old

Dreamers and TPS students, we are more than immigrants, we are the country's future. Future lawyers, doctors, nurses. We matter, and we work hard to educate ourselves and stay out of trouble.

I am a student at George Mason University studying Healthcare Administration & Public Health, and I also work full time. I plan to use my education to improve the health of communities around the world and to help create a better health care system, policy and regulation. TheDream.US scholarship is allowing me to discover exciting and meaningful new career possibilities. During my college years, I hope to gain confidence and connect with a driven community of peers and professionals. Given the current uncertainty with DACA, finishing my education is more important than ever. I believe that knowledge can never be taken from you, so I am determined and driven.

My parents always challenged me to go further than they ever were able to and to finish their education. They've worked hard to help me pay for college, and it hasn't always been easy. This year, I finally received my Associate's degree, and I have them to thank for it. I'm a first generation college student, and I couldn't do it without my family.

My parents, my two older brothers, and I came to the states in 2008. Haiti was unstable, unsafe and my parents hope to provide a better education for the three of us. We came to the United States with visas and later filed for Temporary Protected Status. We've been TPS-holders since.

My loving, caring, and strong father is the backbone of my support system. He was always the provider in my family and knowing something was out of his control truly devastated him. When I was 16 years old, he sat us down and told us, "our visa is going to expire, and things are going to change."

Our visa expiration brought a slew of challenges. But, God gave us a new path forward with TPS. Unfortunately, even with TPS, we weren't able to afford higher education. My brothers stopped their schooling after high school, but I refused to accept that fate.

In 2014, my family and I moved to Virginia, where I waited a year before I started taking classes so I could pay in-state tuition. I began to work at a nursing home full time while taking one or two classes per semester. My father started working two jobs, so he could help me pay for more classes. I attended Northern Virginia Community Center for 4 years, and this year I finally finish. I thank my parents for not giving up, always motivating me, and reminding me that "it doesn't matter how long it takes the important thing is that you finish."

Even though we were seeking safety and protection, I was terrified when we first came to the States. I didn't speak any English, so I started watching cartoons with subtitles. I encouraged myself to speak up, even when I made mistakes, I knew it was part of the process.

I started high school in Florida, and I made friends with other Haitians, which made my adjustment to the U.S easier. I started considering America home after the 2010 massive earthquake struck Haiti. After that devastation, we realized there was nothing to go back to. The Haiti we knew was gone. We donated everything we had back in Haiti to families in need. For the past eleven years, since the day of the earthquake, I've never returned to Haiti. America is my home.

“Carolina,” George Mason University

Degree: History

Hometown: Manassas, VA

Age of Arrival: 2 years old

A lot of high school students in America can share the feelings I remember of uncertainty and anxiety about their future, not knowing whether college was the right decision or how they might pay for an education.

I remember when I was a high school senior and I made the decision to go to college, regardless of my immigration status. It was an extremely tough — and scary — decision to make. I cried and cried and wondered if it would be worth it. But I persisted. I worked hard as a server and paid out of state tuition for my Associate’s degree.

When I was 17, I learned that being undocumented meant, among other things, that there was no financial assistance for me to go to college, and that, if I decided to attend, I would have to pay out of state tuition. I also finally understood that although I could work minimum paying jobs, I would never be able to be a history teacher, as I had always aspired to be.

Just as I completed my Associates degree, I found out I was pregnant. But DACA had also just been announced, and I knew that I had a real opportunity pursue my dreams. Even with a baby on the way, I didn’t give up, and I knew I would go back to school. Now, when I meet other DREAMers, I tell them to have faith and trust that there will be a way— as long as you don’t give up. Don’t ever let your status keep you from reaching for your dreams.

To make ends meet as a single parent, my mother currently works two jobs -- cleaning offices and park bathrooms. She rents a small room that she shares with my older sister, who was born in the U.S. and is an American citizen. It is also evident how being undocumented affects my mom's life. She has worked for over 20 years and still has to work two, sometimes three, jobs to make ends meet. In fact, I found out I was undocumented when I was 15 years old and told my mom that I was going to search for a job because I didn’t want her to have to take a third job. It was then that she sat me down and explained that I was undocumented. But even then, I didn't fully understand what it meant.

DACA has meant, for me and my brother and hundreds of thousands of other DREAMers, that we have new chances. Prior to DACA, my younger brother used to work 14-hour days, six days a week and barely brought home 20k a year. He now works as a warehouse manager making 50k. He lives with his girlfriend, and they are able to afford to rent a townhome on their own. This is just one example of the difference that DACA has made in our lives.

Higher education access for DREAMers is important to our society, because we are part of the society. We can’t exclude members of our society and think that we are doing the best we can. Without access to higher education, and TheDream.US scholarship, I would be struggling to make ends meet, just as my mom is still doing so now. My plan was to continue to work and to save little by little, taking one course a semester. Now that I have to pay full price for my daughter’s day care, I know that it would have taken me years longer to afford to pursue my degree without DACA, TheDream.US scholarship, and in-state tuition.

Currently I volunteer to make and serve meals at my local homeless shelter as often as I can. I also teach adults English when my schedule permits it. I try to encourage those around me to follow their dreams

and to contribute to making our community better. Once I graduate I will also be able to directly give back by being a teacher in my community.

For me, the U.S. has always been my home. I don't know what it is like in Mexico, at least not from my own lived experience. My 3 ½ year old daughter has only ever known Virginia to be her home. If I were forced to leave, not only would I have to go to a place I have never called home, but I would have to take my daughter to a place she has no connection to.

Dixy, George Mason University

Degree: Integrative Studies Major with a Concentration in Liberal Arts for the Teaching Professions

Hometown: Alexandria, VA

Age of Arrival: 10 years old

I think that a lot of DREAMers have a passion within them to want to help people and to help better the life of others. Maybe it's because we have so much personal experience with the difficult parts of life that we want to help others during their tough times.

After graduating from college, I plan to work as an elementary teacher. My goal is to build relationships with the students and help them not only in class, but outside the classroom as well. I also want to receive my English as a Second Language certification so I can help recently arrived students adapt to the U.S.

I remember my own difficulty in adapting to America when I arrived. When I first got to the United States, at the age of 9, everything was so different. I had been raised in the southern area of Honduras, which is very rural, before we fled because of fear of violence. I wasn't accustomed to living in a city, and I wasn't used to living with my parents, since I had been living with my grandparents for most of my childhood. I also found it really hard to adjust because of the language barrier. It was a struggle to learn English as a 5th grader, but I worked hard to learn English and to adjust quickly.

I started to think of America as home about two years after arriving in the U.S. I had adjusted to the American environment, learned the language, and was able to build friendships and participate in my school community.

I've always been aware of my immigration status, and the struggles that come with it. But, ever since I received DACA in 2012, I have been able to continue my education at the college level, have been able to work and even have the opportunity to travel back to Honduras. DACA has allowed me to live in the U.S. without fear of deportation.

I heard about TheDream.US from my high school counselor my senior year of high school, and I am so grateful for the support. I was determined to go to college, even without the scholarship. My plan was to pay for college and take a few credits each semester, while working to support myself and my parents. Going to college is something that I've always wanted, so I would've made the efforts necessary in order to continue.

I first attended Northern Virginia Community College. At NOVA, I received the Honors Scholarship, so I took Honors classes and completed the Honors Program. I then chose George Mason University as my transfer school because it's close to home and I wanted to help my parents. It is also better because I am able to live at home, rather than paying for a room. After graduating from college, I hope to volunteer and lead English classes for the immigrant community.

I would like to remind my fellow DREAMers to work hard and help make the sacrifices our parents made worth it. We need to demonstrate all the ways that we will contribute to American society.

“Ana,” Northern Virginia Community College

Degree: Criminology

Hometown: Alexandria, VA

Age of Arrival: 7 years old

Thanks to DACA and TheDream.US, I will be the first in my family to attend college and get a degree. I will be studying Criminology and Criminal Justice. Later transfer to a four year college. My parents grew up in Honduras. The highest level of education they received was until the sixth grade. After dropping out they focused on working to help out my grandparents.

I came to the United States when I was about six years old. With only a bag of clothes. No money, no food, no nothing. My brother and I got here on a May of 2006. Prior to this my father, was the first to leave for a better future. Back in Honduras it was just my mother brother and I. Later my mom was the one who left Honduras in hopes to find better opportunities. Since money was something we always needed in order to survive. Well a year and a half later we finally arrived to the United States. I started school in mid May. Started first grade. The following summer. I would begin school, but I didn't know I was going to start first grade all over again. This was because I had no clue how to do some of the basic things a first grader knew. Once my brother and I grew a little bit older my father shared his story of how he 'crossed the border.' He would tell me how he crossed by train, on a train they so called ' la bestia ' or so called 'the beast' because of how dangerous it was. My father even told me his life almost ended due to how dangerous it was. If you missed it by nearly you could've died instantly.

When I arrived in the United States, I knew little English. Then came time to attend school. I begged my parents to let me stay home from school because I felt left out. Everyone in my classroom only spoke English. Not knowing English was hard because I didn't comprehend if someone was talking about me or simply having to start a conversation. I isolated myself from all the other kids. Within time I stuck it out and my parents bought me and my brother books to help us with our English. I give credit to my parents for trying to help us with our English.

As years went on by I started High School, made a lot of friends, and finally knew what was going around me. I met a wonderful teacher in particular who really helped me. Her name was Mrs. Szentkiralyi. She would talk to me whenever I needed advice and pushed me to work harder than I ever thought I could. During my breaks I would visit her and talk about issues going on around us. She said just because you aren't a citizen doesn't mean that should stop you from pursuing your goals. Go after them. She helped me apply to colleges and would tell me of all the different college. Which would help me since I am DACA recipient.

Now I'm pursuing my dream of attaining a degree in criminology and criminal justice. I currently attend Northern Virginia Community College and I'm excited to see where I'll go next!

Never in a million years would this ever cross my mind. I was so shocked and happy when I found out I was a TheDream.US scholarship recipient. This scholarship is helping me do what I once thought was impossible. For this I will forever be grateful.

Sadhana Singh, Trinity Washington University

Degree: Communications & International Affairs

Hometown: Georgia

Age of Arrival: 13 years old

Three years ago, I was awarded a scholarship and I enrolled in college. Sounds like a typical student story, right? Now, let me reword the sentence: Three years ago, I was awarded a scholarship that was made possible because of the existence of DACA. This gave me the opportunity to enroll as a first-generation college student at age 28.

I was born in South America. My parents immigrated to the United States in 1999, when I was 13 years old. Trying to get away from the poverty and political conflict in our native country, we settled in the southern United States and started working towards a new life. I graduated from high school with honors, near the top of my class in 2005, but due to my undocumented status, I was not able to afford college, or even apply for it.

Where I lived, I hid my status like a dark secret. I was afraid to come out to my friends. I thought they would look at me as if I was inferior or treat me differently. I was ashamed to reveal that I was undocumented and that college was not going to be my reality, even though I was an excellent student. All I wanted was to move on with my life, and pursue my goals like everyone else. My senior year of high school was tough. My friends would all talk about where they were applying to and where they were accepted, and I would lie and pretend that I was doing the same thing. I hid my status like a secret and I was never able to go a teacher or counselor to ask for help. At this time, I felt alienated, defeated and hopeless.

But I stayed positive. The month after graduation I got a job and began working to help support my family, all the while thinking that something was going to work out for me to start college soon. I was restricted from getting the Pell Grant, federal student aid, private loans, and in-state tuition and my family just did not have the means to pay out of pocket. But I held on to the hope that someday I would get the chance to earn my degree. I ended up waiting close to a decade for that chance.

This period of limbo was quite miserable for me. It was difficult for me to watch my friends move on and accomplish their goals, while I was stuck in the same place. I could not have much of a social life because I had no ID and limited mobility, since I was not able to drive. I felt left behind, stagnant in both my personal and professional development.

In 2012, I received salvation: the announcement of DACA. I could finally get an ID and I could be legally employed. I was protected from deportation. My brother could now drive and get a job, which significantly eased the burden on my dad who had been the family chauffeur for all those years. It was a turning point for me and my family. However, I was still not able to afford college. The scholarship I received in 2014 was newly created for immigrant youth who now have DACA and already possess the drive and commitment towards college, but they lacked the financial means. It fit me perfectly, and it was my ticket to a whole new life. After receiving this incredible scholarship, I was finally able to enroll in college and I became a freshman at age 28.

After DACA, I found a community and a support system that I have never experienced before. I gained courage and confidence to no longer live in the shadows, and I'm not afraid to tell my story. Like the hundreds of thousands of other DACA recipients, I am incredibly grateful for the independence, mobility

and peace of mind that DACA has provided for me. Every day, DACA gives me the drive and determination to go after my goals, when there were times I thought they would never be possible.

I have gained empowerment and self-assurance in who I am, not only as a Dreamer, but as a woman of color as well. I am no longer ashamed of what I am labeled and I make the most of the opportunities and resources that are given to me.

America has been my home for close to two decades now. I grew up in American society but could not fully take part in it. My life was on hold. Five years ago, DACA enabled me to start building my future and to fully contribute to this country. It meant the world to me to know that there are people who believed in me and wanted me to succeed. Today, I am empowered, unafraid and determined to achieve my dreams, and DACA made it possible.

“Whitney,” Trinity Washington University

Degree: Nursing

Hometown: Washington, DC

Age of Arrival: 9 years old

With TheDream.US, I have realized that no matter what, there is always a way. You just have to be patient, resourceful, and hardworking. The winding paths that my life has taken have made me stronger, more resilient, and more empathetic. I want to encourage those facing difficulties and remind them that it's always darkest before the dawn.

My parents met in Germany. My mom is from Cameroon and my father is from Togo. While in Germany, my mom studied theology and my father studied engineering. My mom was in Germany with a visa, while my father had legal status. Once my mom gave birth to me, it gave her legal status in Germany, and she eventually became a citizen. With her theology degree, she was able to open and pastor a church. I lived with my two younger sisters who were born in Germany and my two older sisters who migrated from Cameroon. My mom worked all sorts of jobs to financially support our family.

I came to the United States in 2006. I was 9 years old and remember the adjustment being strange and drastic. When we arrived in the US, we landed in Maryland and stayed with my oldest aunt and cousins. I felt like I was in a strange land. I had difficulty communicating with my cousins, because I did not speak English well enough. At school, I sat in front of the computer for many hours each day doing Rosetta Stone.

My mother sacrificed a lot to bring me here. She was well-known and established in Germany. I know now that she made these sacrifices to give us better lives. As black people in Germany, we faced severe discrimination and needed to get out.

One night, when I was in high school, I received a curfew warning from the neighborhood police. My mom sat me down and told me sternly that I could never get in trouble with the law, because I was undocumented and could be deported straight back to Germany. Though things were sometimes difficult in the United States--we moved nearly every year--I knew that I did not want to go back to Germany.

I sometimes felt the weight of being a stranger in a foreign land, but I learned to rely upon my friends, family, pastors, and mentors.

I am now studying to become a Nurse Practitioner. With that license, I want to help fellow undocumented students go to school and tap into their dreams.

Norma Hernandez, Trinity Washington University

Degree: Nursing

Hometown: Reidsville, North Carolina

Age of Arrival: 6 years old

I came to America, and North Carolina, when I was six with my parents and older sister. When we first enrolled in school, the teacher would simply give me a coloring book when she taught the other students grammar because I would “never understand what they were talking about.” In the evenings, my father would teach me what I had missed during the school day--how to read signs, how to count money, how to write.

Eventually, I started understanding what was being taught in school, and I adjusted to the new surroundings. I learned to love the mountains and the fresh air of North Carolina and would watch an American flag wave in the schoolyard each day. On the weekends during the fall season, my father would take us to the fair to eat funnel cakes, what he called “an American tradition.” His death in 2008 left an ache that has not left me.

In high school, I was involved in Gay-Straight Alliance Club and the Music Honors Society. My mother was working odd jobs of all hours to provide for us and pay for me and my sister’s tuition. My college advisor in high school spoke to me about TheDream.US, but I almost didn’t apply because I thought I wouldn’t get it. I am so glad I went for it. Without TheDream.US, I would have never made it this far. I will start college in the fall and hope to get a degree in forensic science. One day, I would love to pay off my mother’s debts, and ultimately use my work to promote kindness and acceptance among all Americans.

Being an immigrant can be a painful journey, I know that firsthand. But I would tell fellow DREAMers that they should not feel held back by their status, but should shoot for the stars regardless of how many people tell them that they might not succeed. Anyone who lays their head on American soil night after night is an American. DACA and TheDream.US have provided me opportunities that were once beyond my wildest dreams. Now, they are a reality.