

## Immigrant youth shares his dreams

Written by Hector Salamanca

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We stand at the brink of a new America, one that stands up for those millions like me who are American in all but legal status. As an undocumented immigrant, I cannot just sit and hope that a knight in shining armor will rise and fight for my cause. Too many of us undocumented people sit in the shadows and do not stand to fight for what is fair.

I understand that some of us don't act because we are afraid: Afraid that our mother or father will not be there to pick us up from school. Afraid of an immigration officer knocking on our doors. Afraid of letting others know of our situation and afraid how they will respond once we tell them.

I am here to tell you, do not be afraid. I am also here to tell our friends and neighbors, classmates and coworkers, "Do not be afraid" of me and the millions like me who want only to live the American Dream, to work hard, build better lives for our families and a brighter future for our communities and our country.

I, too, was once afraid. When my father broke the news to me in 2010 that my undocumented status meant that my chances for a driver's license, a college education and a good job were slim, I felt stuck and alone. The DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors), which would help people like me, has stalled in Congress since 2001.

But I persevered. I began volunteering with the American Friends Service Committee, a non-profit group providing legal services to immigrants. I finished high school and began study at a community college, where I'm an honors student.

So now I am motivated by a dream, a dream similar to the civil rights activists and the community organizers who have fought for immigration reform before you and I were born. I dream of one day having comprehensive, fair immigration policies that set a path to allow me -- now a Deferred Action participant with my Social Security number and work permit -- to affordably attend college, receive a driver's license, drive my girlfriend around for a change, and to eventually become a citizen, among other things. I dream that one day, I will see

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Dreamers and our allies organize in all 50 states to make that path a reality. In order for my dream to come true, my generation needs to take the lead and move our country forward.

This plea does not apply to just the country's estimated 1.9 million Dreamers, but to all members of our generation. We cannot allow ourselves to grow content with the way things are, for when we are old, the next generation will ask us why we stood by as the rights of others were trampled.

I, too, have faith in the American Dream, because I am living it. Through hard work, I have been given opportunities for success, which is the American Dream. As a child, I read history books filled with great men and women who all struggled to keep that dream alive for all those who called the United States home.

I and many others strive to continue the fight for the American Dream, but we need help. To continue building upon the legacy of those before us, we need to stand up and fight for the rights of the oppressed. For we are the generation of hope and change. We cannot allow the flame that is the American Dream to be extinguished.

We the Dreamers, in fact, represent the American Dream for the 21st century because many of us have risen out of the abyss of despair to achieve success. We are honor students, graduates from universities and hardworking; above all else, we long to contribute to the country we call home.

The American Dream has always been to rise from nothing and become successful through hard work. For me, I want to continue my education and be the first in my family to graduate from college and to continue to contribute back to my community. I want to prove to our opponents that they can try and deny us opportunities, but we shall overcome our obstacles and surpass our goals.

If you are a Dreamer reading this, I urge you to go and start volunteering. Every time you volunteer, you are making a positive impact on someone's life and taking down misconceptions as well. Take courage in knowing you are not alone, for I and many others are right beside you, fighting for our opportunity to contribute and move our country forward.

I also ask those who are not Dreamers to help out in any way you can. We need a coalition of friends, neighbors, Democrats, Republicans, young and old, black, brown, yellow and white, to pass not just the Dream Act, but comprehensive immigration reform. Stand in solidarity with us, and together we can keep the American Dream alive for all those who just want an opportunity to give back to this great nation we call home.