THERE IS NO MORE TIME TO WASTE!
LISTEN. LEARN. ACT.
DACA

By: Nikkita McPherson & Deyanira Aldana

As a part of the Sociology Department’s 2018 Daniel Patrick O’Connor Memorial lecture the Sociology Department hosted Deyanira Aldana. Co-sponsors for Deyanira Aldana’s visit included The Butler Center, Department of Southwest Studies and the Colorado Springs Dream Team. Over the course of her two-day visit Deyanira Aldana facilitated an organizing workshop in support of the Colorado Springs Chapter of United We Dream and delivered a talk to the Colorado Springs community.

Nikkita McPherson (the Diversity and Inclusion Programs Coordinator in The Butler Center) spoke with Deyanira Aldana to learn more about DACA, the importance of becoming informed and being supportive allies and accomplices.

(NM) Please explain what DACA is? How did you get involved in this work?

(DA) DACA stands for “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals” and it is an executive order introduced by President Obama in 2012. It provided protection from deportation as well as a work authorization permit. The permit allows for legal employment for children who came into the country before the age of 16, but were no older than age 30. If a person arrives in the U.S. at age 16 plus one day or age 30 plus one day then they would not qualify. The way it works is that you send an application with all the evidence that you have been in the U.S. since June of 2007 and you have proof that you have not left the country for more than 90 days. You then go through biometrics (which includes passing a criminal background check). It really debunks the myth where people say that DACA recipients are criminals because there is no way we can receive DACA if we were criminals. It was renewable every two years at the cost of $165; the cost has now increased to $495. There are many clinics but sometimes I have seen lawyers that charge a fee of up to $1,000 just to fill out the DACA application. I got involved with the work because I have DACA. I have been involved with organizing since 2012, a little bit after the DACA announcement… I worked with 5 other Brown Women in stopping deportations and we were able to stop 5 deportations in the course of 2 months during the Obama administration. Then I got involved with “United We Dream” and somebody believed in me and they called me (in 2016) and said “hey, there is this job opportunity I think you will be great for.” I said to myself, “hey, I am working at Panera, might as well do it.” So I applied and here I am almost 2 years later.

(NM) What are Dreamers asking for?

(DA) I want to take this time to break down the dreamer narrative a little bit because it is very exclusive. I am this typical dreamer, I was at the top of my class, I went to community college on an honors program, but because I am undocumented, I did not finish. There are folks with 4.0 GPA, have their bachelors, going to get their masters and that creates what people think the ideal immigrant should be. My brother-in-law came into the country when he was 17 and he did not have the opportunity to finish high school. He did not have the opportunity to finish his GED. He leaves our home at 8am and does not come back home until 9pm. He also deserves an opportunity to life of dignity and a life without fear, as I have been able to do with DACA. The term that I would prefer to use is immigrant youth or undocumented youth. That’s not to say that there are not people that really identify with the Dreamer narrative because there are folks who go to school, who thrive, who have associated themselves with that narrative. However, you can also be an immigrant youth and be at the top of your class and educated. I think that what I have heard a lot from immigrant youth is “Okay, I will get something, but what is going to happen to my parents?” That probably has been the biggest worry that a lot of our people have been saying. When we first started this, the prevailing sentiment was I want something, but I do not want it at the expense of my parents. I can relate. My mom is undocumented, I will never throw her under the bus and we have been working hard to ensure there is the least amount of negative things for our
communities. Moreover, we have been working hard to ensure that there will not be any implications to communities that have temporary protection status (TPS), people coming from El Salvador, Nicaragua or Sudan.

(NM) What are the on the ground implications for DACA?

(DA) Right now, we are fighting for a DREAM Act, which is a piece of legislation that would ultimately give a pathway to citizenship for nearly 3 million undocumented youth, which brings the number up from 800,000 to almost 3 million (the largest number of immigrant youth protected). In the bill (in the way that it was originally introduced) there would be no backlash or consequence. Ultimately, we want the removal of DACA. Unfortunately, I’ve seen the harm of its removal. I met Antonio from California, and he lost his DACA status. He no longer has DACA and lives in fear of deportation every day. Karen from Wisconsin lost her DACA one week before the government shutdown (for her, she really needed something to happen on January 19th). So now she is sitting at home wondering what is going to happen to her in Wisconsin, what is going to happen to her job, being fearful that she is not going to make rent, that she is going to be deported. She told me that she has talked to her mom, and her mom tells her, “I’m really worried about you. I don’t know what’s going to happen to you”. The amount of mental health issues that this brings in my community is huge. I, myself, since I started working, I have seen my anxiety just peak. I have found myself having to go home a lot because I can regenerate and then come back. When I am at home, I have no anxiety attacks. However, when I am working, because I see the stories of my people, I suffer anxiety almost daily. I think that the reality is that people are losing their jobs. They are losing their scholarships. They live in a state of constant fear. The way that I describe it is when your body is dancing and you’re holding your breath -- that’s how these people are living, and have yet been able to exhale. That’s what our community is going through. Not to mention those who have never had DACA, who are like, “This could be me”. Who are so excited and who are throwing everything they have to make sure that they get something.

(NM) What do you hope will happen next?

(DA) Right now (ultimately in my utopian world) we would get permanent citizenship for everyone, right? However, ideally, what we want is a permanent solution for immigrant youth. United We Dream is the largest immigrant-youth-led network. I do not have allies who are working for me. When we sit at the roundtables, United We Dream asks me what I think about what is happening. I manage a team of five, and I’m like, “this is what is happening, where do you think we want to take this work?” It is immigrant youth working to protect immigrant youth. One of our principles is that the ones who are directly affected are the ones who are coming up with the solutions. Right now, we are talking to our NLC (our National Leadership Committee) that is made up of our strongest teams and each brings a person to the table. We talk about, “Hey, this is what’s happening right now, this is where it could go”. Our Advocacy Team talks to them, and we’re like – Back in January, if I’m real with you, we knew that the DACA program at some point, we didn’t know when, would be rescinded. In January, we had a meeting in Virginia where our NLC came and through our advocacy efforts we knew a Dream Act was on the table but that there were other possibilities. In that moment we came together as a leadership body and said we want United We Dream to support the Dream Act and if our leadership body wants a “dream act” we are going to push for a “dream act” then when the moment comes we will have a campaign ready. That is how we do all of our campaigns. And this is why we are pushing for a Dream Act and why we are pushing for a permanent solution. The reality of the situation is that there is white supremacy, there is racism in the White House...[there are representatives in congress] they are anti-immigrants, the ones who still use the word illegal and who are actively using their energy for negative reasons...Right now we are trying to get the least kind of enforcement possible. Getting the most with the least. I cannot speak for folks at the border, but I will not take more ICE agents. My family lives in New Jersey and we have a private detention center. We saw in February that ICE agents jumped on our train and asked people for papers. My mom takes the train; my best friend takes the train. . . what papers? We want permanent solution with the least amount of harm to our communities. We know that right now we are in a moment where we do not have the luxury to be...We are on
the defense and we have a hard time pushing forward because a lot of what we have to do right now is block the racism plaguing our communities.

(NM) *What are your thoughts on the national narrative of immigration being on Mexican people when there are people from all over the world?*

(DA) *I am Mexican; I came from Vera Cruz, Mexico that is in southeast Mexico. I think that my family was privileged when we came here because we were able to cross an entire country that was our own. My mom’s best friend...her niece walked from Guatemala to the border. I remember when she came here I was like hey let’s go shopping and I will buy you shoes. She had to get her shoes an entire size bigger because it had been weeks since she got here but her feet were still swollen. I have a friend who migrated from Africa and he tells stories about how he fell asleep and woke up in America. For him getting DACA was such a struggle because he did not even have a birth certificate. I know people from South Korea, who had to watch as their grandparents died back home without being able to go back to South Korea. I am in this town called Little Budapest and there are many Latinos, but I have seen a wave of Ukrainian migrants who come and being an immigrant, I wonder if they came on visas and overstayed and I wonder what happened to them. What will happen to the children in a predominately Latino school where ESL (English as a Second Language) is not offered for them. How are they going to speak English when none of the teachers speak their language. I recently saw a report on the active persecution of Irish immigrants and how an Irish immigrant from Boston was picked up. He had a son that was a newborn and his wife who is a U.S. citizen will have to pack up and leave to go be with him, because it is either “I don’t see my husband; or my child has no father; or I am forced to move to Ireland. Migration is an issue that is happening all over the world. Yes, there is a lot of Mexican migration because it is South of the border. What I invite people to do is read. Read *Open Veins of Latin America* or *Harvest of Empire*. Start with *Harvest of Empire* so you know the reasons our people migrated. Because if we are going to be real with our folks, it is U.S. involvement in areas that they did not have to be in. El Salvador is the way it is because the U.S. walked in after El Salvador had democracy and took over. Let us not forget about Chiquita Banana that ran rampages in areas and monopolized areas in Guatemala. *Harvest of Empire* is the place to start. Don’t judge people who are migrating here without understanding why. Nobody wants to leave the things they had at home. My mom left her mom and two sisters that she will never see again because they passed away. My mom did not come to this country saying, “I am going to come here because it’s going to be fun.” My dad came here in the winter of ’95 when they had to use trucks to take the snow to the bay and he tells stories about how he had to eat stale bread but gave me ramen noodle soup because I deserved a better life. Believe me when I tell you that I did not know anything about America before I came here. I said bye to my aunt on her back steps and she was crying; and til this day I remember asking her why she was crying, I was going to see her in a couple of days. It has been 20 years since I last saw her. She knew I wasn’t coming back.

*Closing Thoughts from Deyanira Aldana*

*From the bottom of my heart, I urge all of you to get informed. The world! The arguments! The wars! and the fights all start from miscommunication; and from hateful rhetoric that is not backed up by any facts. I get it, we are a passionate people, believe me when I tell all of these conservatives and these folks who have come out as anti-immigrant, to believe me when I tell you that I also believe that you are struggling...My struggles are not taking away from yours. We are not in a place to have suffering hierarchy “I am suffering more than you, because I am dealing with this.” No. We are all suffering and I know that a lot of white communities, especially in rural areas, live in poverty, I understand because my people live in poverty too. We would be so much grander if we all came together. So get informed, read up about DACA, ask us questions, United We Dream has an email ([info@unitedwedream.org](mailto:info@unitedwedream.org)). If you have questions, we have answers. We have someone who is a correspondent for youth. Do your research. Read some books. Read some articles. Hear some stories (to be able to get informed and to actually know what’s going on)!*