

## **Katherine Flores' story, a Dreamer from New Haven, CT**

My family is originally from Honduras where poverty and violence are an everyday occurrence. My story begins when my father immigrated to the United States nearly 23 years ago in order to be able to eventually give my mom and me a better life.

In 2002, my mom came to visit my father for a couple of months while I stayed in Honduras with some family members. While my mom was visiting my father she got pregnant. Scared to have another child in Honduras, my mom made a tough decision and decided to have my sister born here in the USA. For some time my mom was flying from the US to Honduras to be able to spend some time with each of her children.

At some points during this time, my mom describes herself as being heartbroken: being with one daughter and missing the other. In a desperate move, my mom applied for a visa for me with the hope of me being reunited with my dad and sister. In January of 2007, when I was 11, we arrived at JFK and I met my dad for the first time. My mom was finally able to have her family together no matter the circumstances. My dad had been working at Chabaso Bakery in production for 19 years. He holds a TPS (temporary protected status) which allows him to work and provide for his family.

I immediately started 7th grade at Roberto Clemente in the bilingual classroom. The classroom was very interesting as many kids arrived throughout the year knowing various levels of English. New Haven quickly became my new home. I went to Common Ground High school where I made lifetime friends. My teenage years were the same as my peers and I never felt different from them. . . until in 2011 when I started searching for colleges. That is when I found out I was illegal and it dawned on me that college was not going to be an option for me. It made me feel different, as if I had done something wrong, even though I had no voice in the choices made for me when I was younger. I felt as if I had a secret. The uncertainty of not knowing what the future held made me scared. My college counselor was very helpful and found different colleges that I was able to get in. Unfortunately, the prices were very high and too much for my parents to afford since I didn't qualify for FAFSA.

I felt frustrated with myself because having achieved high honors in every term, all my efforts just seemed like nothing. I felt mad at my parents for placing me in that situation. After dwelling on all that is unfair in my world, my counselor advised me to at least go to Community College where I would slowly but surely be able to take classes. I always go by the saying, "It is not how long it takes that is important, it is getting there." With the financial help of my parents and some scholarships I had acquired I was taking courses.

In 2012, President Obama passed D.A.C.A and I was one of the first ones to get my permit. I finally felt normal again. I had peace and I could see a future where everything was going to work out. I started working at Saint Francis & St Rose of Lima School as an aide for one of the preschool classrooms. They offered me to take some online courses to become an assistant teacher. I finished my Associate's degree in Science with early childhood credits. In that time I was also able to get my driver's license and pursue my bachelor's degree.

In 2015, I started working for Friends Center for Children as an Infant Toddler head teacher and finish my Bachelor's degree in Science with a concentration in Early Childhood. I had become a big contributor in my household, sharing bills with my parents to be able to provide for my sister and brother. I felt a responsibility as the eldest sister to be at times the rope that held everyone together.

2017 has brought the uncertainty of when I first found out I was illegal back in 2011, a feeling that I thought I would never have to feel again. Not having D.A.C.A. has given me sleepless nights and not knowing where I belong anymore. I lived in New haven for 13 years of my life, more years than I lived in the country where I was born. I am proud of my Honduran roots and heritage, but this is where I belong, my friends are here, my family is here. If I was ever to go back, I don't think I would know what to do or where to go. I worry that the day of my permit's expiration will come and there will not be any resolution. All I keep thinking is how am I going to help my family, how will I help my parents support my sister and brother.

**Personal testimony from Steve Whinfield – FCNLGeneral Committee Member:**

Friends Center for Children is an Early Childhood Education Center on our Meeting's property. It was started from our meetings leading. The school is ages 0-5 full year school and it's mission is to Educate Children, Empower Families, Inspire Teachers, Engage Community and Embrace Diversity. It started in our basement at the meeting with 12 children and is now a large school house for 78 children. The energy is amazing. Katherine is an intricate part of its success. We want to support her and her spirit. She was very concerned with her children and families when we have discussed her DACA status. I have personally seen her light and it is life giving. I have felt it and I'm sure her kids and families have too.