

### **This is the story of Marina Chavez – a Dreamer from San Diego.**

I came here when I was five years old, I came with my family— both parents, my sister, and two brothers. The major motivation for my parents to bring us to America was my sister's health condition, her cleft palette. Upon our arrival I started kindergarten and started making San Diego our home. We integrated into the society, we made friends, we enrolled in schools, my sister's condition started getting treated, and my dad was working at the car wash. I have lived here since 1990, graduated from high school in 2003, I have taken classes at community college toward an Associates Degree in child education, yet I was unable to complete the degree because I didn't have papers. I had to stop because if I completed the program, I would have had to take the licensing test, but I couldn't do that because of my status. Since 1999 I have worked with children in our neighborhood, I started babysitting on a limited basis then moved into regular assisting at a daycare, I worked with mostly with four families. I have maintained friendships with all my families and now the kids I cared for are in college or have already graduated. One of the families I worked with calls me their daughter from another mother, we are that close!

When the neighborhood kids no longer needed regular care, I started working at a local restaurant, I also started taking baking classes to expand my skill set. I tried to develop as many abilities as possible to keep me versatile and able to put together income. It was hard to not have a legal license to drive, yet I learned to drive and even owned a car, but every time I went anywhere it was a risk. There were many discouraging aspects of working under the table because I always knew I couldn't work to the level of my experience or ability. DACA gave me protection and for the first time I dreamed I might *actually belong*. I felt that I was finally being accepted into a society I had already been a part of, I wasn't in the shadows anymore. It gave me some confidence and dignity and optimism.

I recently had my first child, my baby daughter Alina. Being deported would mean that I would have to take her back to the country of my birth but not the country that I know. It would mean that I would have to take her away from her birth country. It would deny her the rights of citizenship, education, and opportunity that she deserves. It would put me back in a life that is foreign, it would take away everything I have known and loved. I have worked hard, paid my taxes, volunteered, and have been a contributing member of my neighborhood, my community and society at large. Like anyone, all I know is the life I have lived, and that has been as an American. I wouldn't be able to know Mexico the way I know San Diego, my life here has formed my identity, it makes me who I am.