



Making it in America: The Dreamers 3:34

IMMIGRATION

Making it in America: video series highlights survival in the midst of immigration reform

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Special to the Miami Herald

SEPTEMBER 25, 2017 3:19 PM

Immigrants are a major driver of the economy in Florida, where they have launched more than 330,000 companies that together employ more than half a million Floridians. They are impacting every corner of our state, from Pensacola to Key West.

Making it in America, a new video series, puts a face on Florida's immigrant population. It takes viewers into the lives of those neighbors down the street, who maybe speak with a bit of an accent, but are no less committed to this country's future than the rest of us.

Airing on Miami Herald.com, WPBT2 and other media outlets around Florida, the series is divided into multiple episodes, and installments will be featured monthly.

The first episode snapshots the lives of three young DACA recipients — also known as Dreamers.

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Since 2012, almost 800,000 young immigrants who were previously undocumented have received temporary legal status under DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). Eighty one percent of DACA-eligible recipients have graduated from high school and taken a college course. They come from everywhere: Venezuela, Russia, Brazil, Mexico, India, China, Haiti. They are 15 percent more likely to start their own businesses than U.S.-born citizens, and they earn almost \$20 billion in annual income.

Earlier this month, the Trump administration announced that it would be “rescinding” DACA. That will leave almost a million young people — colleagues, classmates, mortgage holders, business owners — with their futures in doubt.

Among them are Karen Caudillo, a college student at the University of Central Florida, whose family moved to Naples from Mexico when she was four years old. Growing up in Naples, she took care of her U.S.-born little sister while her mom cleaned houses and her dad worked in construction. Today, Caudillo owns an organic home-cleaning business and is working on a bachelor’s degree at UCF.

“I’m afraid that one day I will be taken away from my parents, that I won’t be able to see my sister again,” she says.

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Karen Caudillo, college student

Honduran-born Monica Lazaro was a freshman at Miami Dade College, nursing her mother through terminal colon cancer, when DACA was created. After her mother died, she raised her U.S.-born brother and cooked dinner for her father every night while going to college. She now works two jobs as a legal clerk and as a medical researcher, to save enough money to go to graduate school. She wants to be a public health professional.

“This feels like my country,” says Lazaro, who arrived in the U.S. when she was 9. “I just don’t know what to expect. I haven’t even planned for the worst yet because I can’t fathom not having DACA anymore. The hardest part of losing DACA would be wasting the last seven years.”

The DACA issue will come to a head within months, when recipients will begin losing legal status, unless congress acts. A new bill known as the “conservative Dream Act” would provide a pathway to citizenship for as many as 2.5 million young undocumented immigrants, but one that is long and involves “extreme vetting.”

Making it in America will revisit the stories of some of those affected down the road, to see how they are faring in a new reality. Will they have to quit their jobs? Drop out of college? Be separated from family members? The consequences of ending DACA are not yet clear.

In future episodes, the video series will focus more on immigrant entrepreneurs and those who strive for success. The aim is to tell the side of the immigration story that few ever hear about: the quiet lives led in our neighborhoods and cities, the focus on survival, which often leads to success, and unwavering faith in America’s future.

We will highlight people like Pedro Sifuentes, who came to Florida as a penniless immigrant from Mexico and is now one of the largest landowners and farmers in south Miami-Dade County. Luis Garcia, who came to South Florida as a penniless immigrant from Nicaragua, now owns the fourth largest concrete company in Florida. He employs more than 100 people. And then there’s Mary Chau, who came from Vietnam to the United States as a teenager and now owns a nail salon empire in Orlando and beyond.

Explica Media, makers of the film, has partnered with several news outlets throughout Florida to distribute the independently-produced video series, which was partly funded by sponsors.

Spending time with immigrants from different parts of the world, and from all walks of life, reveals a common thread of humanity. Getting to know them in Florida also reveals a common purpose as Americans.

We hope these videos fill an information need in your community, and reveal a side of immigrants that surprises. This is how immigrants are *Making it in America*.

OSCAR CORRAL, A FORMER NEWSPAPER REPORTER AND EMMY AWARD-WINNING DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER, IS MANAGING DIRECTOR OF EXPLICA MEDIA. HE CAN BE REACHED AT OCORRAL@EXPLICAMEDIA.COM





Jorge Cortez is among young immigrants whose futures are in doubt. **Explica Media** - Courtesy

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