

# Growing up undocumented

*These Dreamers beat the odds, and now they're speaking out in the hopes that others will too*

**BY EMILY GREEN**  
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**T**hey knew their families were different, and they knew that difference meant they had fewer rights than most Americans.

They watched as their parents swallowed their pride and went to work for long hours at menial and labor-intensive jobs, never seeming to get ahead and always seeming to miss birthdays.

While “the land of opportunity” is the only home they can remember, its opportunities always seemed to be hanging just slightly out of reach.

With no access to health care coverage, after-school sports weren't common among kids in their community – they were painfully aware that a broken bone was a luxury their families could not afford.

As they became teenagers, and classmates began to talk of all the freedoms a driver's license would bring, they knew that milestone was off-limits to kids like them.

No matter how good their report cards or how many extracurricular activities they racked up, they wouldn't be eligible for most college scholarships, loans or federal financial aid.

As high school graduation approached, they saw other kids of their status begin working full time in order to help provide for their parents and siblings, forgoing college and repeating the cycle of poverty.

This is what it's like to grow up undocumented in Oregon, according to three young adults who sat down with Street Roots to share their stories.

They are close friends, all graduating this past year from Salem's McKay High School, where 64 percent of the student body is Latino. All three were brought to the U.S. illegally when they were just toddlers, and while their parents had different reasons for leaving Mexico, they all had the same dream: that their children would have a better future in America.

Growing up, they learned that being an undocumented immigrant meant you did what you could to survive.

Fátima Preciado said she hopes her story will help motivate other Oregonians to join their cause. All three have taken leadership roles at Causa, an organization aimed at improving the lives of Oregon's Latino immigrants.

“I'm just like you,” Fátima said. “I have my own dreams too. I want to be able to make a difference in this world, and I think anyone can see themselves in me.”

Since the election in November, Fátima has spoken publicly about her immigration status, sharing her story and encouraging others to do the same. For this reason, we are publishing her first and last name. Her friends Manuel and Joseluis asked that we use only their first names.

Coming of age in a country where you



PHOTOS BY JOSEPH GLODE

From left, Manuel, Fátima Preciado and Joseluis. These graduates of Salem's McKay High School are Dreamers, recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. They are among roughly 12,000 undocumented immigrants in Oregon to be granted DACA status.

don't have the opportunities of others around you can be “heartbreaking,” Manuel said.

In 2012, however, their futures all began to look a little brighter. That's when the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program was announced, making it possible for qualifying undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children to apply for temporary protection from deportation.

While DACA recipients, known as “Dreamers,” aren't given the full rights of citizenship, they can legally work and go about their lives without fear of deportation.

In Oregon, lawmakers deliberated for several months before deciding in January 2013 that Dreamers would also be permitted to drive.

Fátima, Manuel and Joseluis are just three of roughly 12,000 undocumented immigrants in Oregon to be granted DACA status, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

To remain protected from deportation, Dreamers must submit an application for renewal every two years, a process that involves a background check, fingerprinting and a \$495 fee. Fátima and Manuel are both in the renewal process, with their statuses soon to expire. They're both confident they'll be approved.

On April 18, the day we spoke with the three friends at Causa's Southeast Portland office, news broke that a DACA recipient had been deported to Mexico in February.

President Donald Trump said April 21 that Dreamers “should rest easy.” He told The Associated Press his immigration policies were aimed at criminals, not Dreamers. Just two days later, however, ABC

News asked Attorney General Jeff Sessions if he agreed with the president's statement, and he replied: “Well, we'll see. I believe that everyone that enters the country unlawfully is subject to being deported.”

Fátima said she's aware her decision to be vocal about her status could result in detainment, as it did for Daniela Vargas, the 22-year-old who was arrested after giving testimony at a conference in Jackson, Miss. Vargas' DACA status had lapsed.

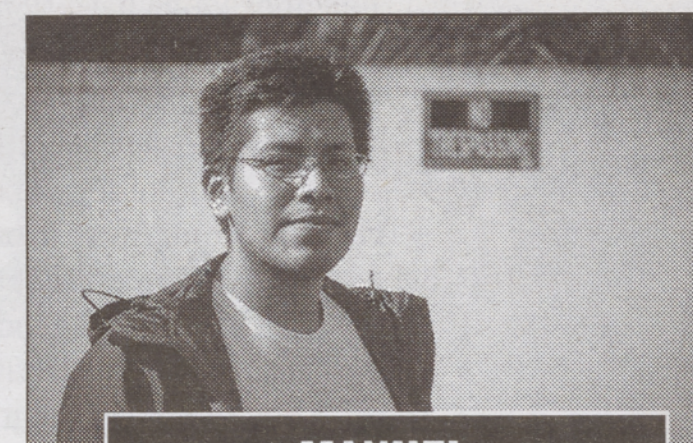
When asked why she was willing to put herself on the line, Fátima said it's important to speak up.

“It shows that we're not going to stop. We are going to keep fighting regardless. We are not people who simply give up when things are tough,” she said.

In March, North Portland resident Emmanuel Ayala Frutos, 21, was arrested and detained just two weeks after his DACA status expired. He told local news media that immigration officials told him they simply wanted to ask him questions about his DACA renewal application but then arrested him.

Neither Fátima, Joseluis nor Manuel knew what exactly they would do if they were deported tomorrow – they have no memories of life in Mexico and little knowledge of how to survive there.

“Imagining myself in that situation,” Fátima said, “I would have no idea what to do. I don't know who I would call. I have family in Mexico, but I don't know them. I was raised here in America. Everything I know – my community, my education, my friends, my teachers – everything is here. My family is here.”



MANUEL

**M**anuel was 3 years old when his mother brought him from their home in a rural mountain village in Oaxaca, Mexico, to the U.S. His father had crossed the border two years earlier, and it was time to join him.

“There's not a means to make money there,” Manuel said of Oaxaca. “You work hard every single day, making around \$1 a day, so it can be difficult to access resources like food, education, healthy water – what you need to flourish and grow up to be a healthy human being.”

His family lived in Woodburn, then Bend, before settling down in Salem seven years ago.

Manuel remembered that when he was approved for DACA status at age 15, he thought, “Wow – my whole world just changed!” He said most importantly, he could help his parents with his new, official identification card.

“I can show my I.D.,” he said, “because you need an I.D. for everything, and sometimes when you are undocumented, you can't get one, so it opened a lot of

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