

From the treasurer

Teachers are powerful allies for undocumented students

UTLA steps up support for immigrant youth.



By Arlene Inouye, UTLA Treasurer, with Araceli Campos and Ilse Escobar

Ilse's story

At the UTLA Local 1021 meeting in October, Ilse Escobar shared her story of growing up undocumented.

"Teachers played the most important role in my leadership journey," Escobar said. "Growing up, they were the only people I spoke to about my immigration status."

While her classmates focused on college planning and prom, Ilse was secretly focused on her fear that, at any time, immigration officials could knock on the door of her family's apartment, ask to see proof of their immigration status, and deport them.

"I was suffocating in my silence," she said. "I was accepted to many four-year universities, but could not attend because I was ineligible for financial aid [undocumented students are now eligible under the California Dream Act]. I did not even tell my parents because it would break their hearts. Finally, I told an educator and everything changed."

This teacher was ready to guide her to resources. Most importantly, he connected her to other undocumented students who also had sought his guidance.

Once Ilse found support from teachers who addressed her challenges as an undocumented student, things changed. She eventually joined other immigrant students as an activist demanding changes to state and national immigration policy so that other students would not have to suffer as she did, including efforts that led to the California Dream Act. She also graduated from UCLA. Today, she is a nonprofit leader, directing programming at the Miguel Contreras Foundation.

Supporting undocumented students is part of the Schools L.A. Students Deserve

Did you know that California has the largest number of undocumented students in the country? It is also estimated that LAUSD has the most undocumented students of any school district in the country and that undocumented students may comprise 30% to 50% of students in LAUSD schools. Ilse's story reveals the unique challenges and support needed from the school district and teachers. Without more support, undocumented students will suffer in silence and not connect college and career encouragement with their own lives. This is why UTLA has stepped up our support for undocumented students alongside the broader organized labor community.

To support students, UTLA works closely with grassroots organizations and our state and national unions to provide comprehensive resources to undocumented students and their families. UTLA specifically supports students in obtaining protection from deportation and work permits through the new Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. UTLA partners with California State University Northridge (CSUN) and Advancing Justice L.A. on a training program for youth and weekly legal clinics in seven languages to ensure students apply to DACA. We also developed a unique network to bring college students into classrooms or parent centers to learn about weekly community and legal clinics for DACA.

In addition, UTLA supports the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor's new Labor Task Force on Immigration, a group comprised of union leaders representing a cross-section of organized labor in Los Angeles County. This includes regular



The Summer for the People training builds leadership in low-income high school students.

convenings of the task force and increasing support for labor leadership and membership in a coming series of "teach-ins" on immigration and naturalization. The Miguel Contreras Foundation partners with UTLA and the Labor Task Force on Immigration to provide educational and legal resources on immigration. Specifically, the foundation and UTLA have partnered to train educators and students on the challenges faced by undocumented students and the resources that exist to support them.

Through the Build the Future, Fund the Fight initiative, UTLA will gain a larger voice and more support in our fight for social justice, educational equity, and access by having dual membership in our state and national unions and the County Federation of Labor.

About the Miguel Contreras Foundation

The Miguel Contreras Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded out of the Los Angeles labor movement to honor union leader Miguel Contreras. It is housed at the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor. The foundation supports educational success, immigrant integration, and civic engagement in low-income communities throughout Los Angeles County. The

foundation offers several programs that serve local immigrant students and many are in partnership with UTLA:

Annual Scholarship Program: The Miguel Contreras Foundation awards scholarships to graduating high school students from low-income communities in Los Angeles. In 2015, the foundation awarded \$50,000 to 25 students. Beyond supporting students financially, the foundation offers year-round mentoring and support to scholarship recipients to ensure their retention and success in higher education.

Summer for the People: Summer for the People is a free five-week summer program that builds the leadership of low-income high school students in Los Angeles, focusing on immigrant students. This innovative program is led by immigrant youth leaders to deepen students'

awareness of contemporary social justice issues and movements. The curriculum and staff provide a well-rounded program that offers college- and job-readiness, and a long-term passion for social justice.

Immigrant Student Leadership & Organizing Program: Building on five years of work with immigrant high school students, the foundation launched a year-round program to support the large number of undocumented students in the LAUSD. Led by immigrant youth leaders, this program is carried out through several series to build communities of support within local high schools. Beyond supporting students with resources on financial aid and DACA, the foundation fosters long-term activism.

Parent/Family Leadership & Organizing: The Miguel Contreras Foundation builds upon its immigrant youth programming by supporting the working parents/families of our students. This includes trainings for parents on issues related to supporting their children's educations, knowing their rights in the workplace, and long-term civic engagement.

For more information about the Miguel Contreras Foundation's programming or to request support in serving your immigrant students and parents, please contact (213) 351-9560 or info@miguelcontrerasfoundation.org. If you would like a youth to present about DACA in your classroom or parent center, please contact Arlene Inouye ainouye@utla.net or (213) 368-6218.

Facts about undocumented youth

- Undocumented students are aspiring citizens who came to the U.S. without legal documentation or overstayed their visas.
- 2.5 million undocumented youth live in the U.S., and California has, by far, the highest number.
- About 65,000 to 80,000 undocumented students graduate from U.S. high schools each year. Only 5% to 10% of these graduates go to college.
- Many students don't know they're undocumented until they begin the college process.
- Undocumented students don't qualify for state or federal grants or loans, even if their parents pay taxes. Undocumented students may be eligible for in-state tuition only in certain states (California, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, and Washington).



Arlene Inouye (second from left) with Ilse Escobar and other presenters from the Miguel Contreras Foundation at the Homies Unidos Central American Leadership Conference at Santee Educational Center on September 19.

Resources

Guide for Teachers Helping Dreamers: This guide was created for teachers and service providers who teach, mentor, and help undocumented youth. It is intended to be a brief, easy-to-read guide on how to help undocumented youth and where they can get support. bitly.com/guideforteachers

Top 10 ways to support undocumented students: A list of 10 powerful ways educators can support undocumented students. bitly.com/EducatorTop10

Supporting undocumented youth through community engagement: A synthesis of relevant research and a list of recommendations for how schools can support undocumented youth. bitly.com/idranewsletter