

I came from El Salvador to the United States five years ago. I remember that February when I left my mother and sisters because I couldn't contain my tears. However, leaving was a chance I knew I had to take because in El Salvador, although I could be happy living with my family, at the same time I felt as if I was living in a darkness that was filled with violence, and not enough economic resources. I also knew that in this environment it would be almost impossible for me to continue my studies after 9th grade. During my 22-day trip, I was arrested in Mexico and forced to go back to my country. However, I decided to try again, walking in the desert for two days and three nights without food and limited water. The only thing that I had with me during this difficult time was my soul, motivation, and courage. I never gave up. I constantly repeated to myself: *“I have to do it. I am going to go to college to be successful, and I am going to come back, be a lawyer, represent my family, my community and myself.”*

In 2013, after my arrival in the U.S. I decided to join a non-profit organization called the Central American Resources Center (CARECEN), an organization that advocates for immigrants' rights. After one year of working with CARECEN, I was thinking positively and was committed more than ever to speaking out about immigrant rights. I began telling my story at protests, conferences and panels. I also started recruiting youth to participate in a storytelling project. The purpose of the project was to make our voices heard and change people's perspective about undocumented youth.

In 2014 I joined the Latin American Youth Center (LAYC), an organization that provides youth the opportunity to learn new experiences through leadership programs. As a member of LAYC I have participated in different activities to combat discrimination and celebrate diversity. Two years ago, my friend Deysy and I enlisted local community leader, Juan Pacheco, to help us create a youth summit in DC to motivate and support other immigrant youth. As a result of the summit's success, we founded the Latino Youth Leadership Council (LYLC), a group of 28 students from six different schools in DC. Our work focuses primarily on organizing community conferences. We have reached hundreds of adults and youth with the purpose of representing undocumented youth and letting them know that they are not alone and that together we are going to make a better community.

I believe education is the best tool to be successful and help your community. Education, public service, and community engagement improve the health and growth of a community in

ways that create a better environment. Public service is a requirement for addressing injustices in our society. If people are only motivated by money, they will do nothing to improve the welfare of their community. When people become engaged with community initiatives, there is a big change that happens. Some positive changes have come about in my own life as a result of my commitment to prioritizing public service: I know now what I really want to study and I am not silent or shy anymore. I am more positive even when there are difficult times. I believe that youth voice matters, and we can't give up no matter what the situation. If we fail, we must stand up again and continue. In the future I want to be an immigration lawyer to help those undocumented youths that don't have a representative to help them raise their voices and succeed. Something that I have learned is that if we make mistakes, we must learn from them and do right the next time and continue fighting for our dreams. I am going to be successful for myself, my family and my community because I will continue fighting for justice and help youth make their dreams reality.