

Immigration movement: 'Dreamers' organize CLOUD group to help others avoid deportation

Contra Costa Times (California)

September 18, 2012 Tuesday

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Section: BREAKING; My Town; Education; Contra Costa; News; National; Local

Length: 1211 words

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Body

RICHMOND -- When Carlos Martinez was 11 years old, he jumped the border in Arizona between Mexico and the United States and made his way across a desert for four days and three nights with his younger sister and a group of about 20 other immigrants, led by a "coyote," a person paid to smuggle people into the country. After the journey, Martinez and his sister joined their mother in Salinas.

He attended schools in the community and wanted to go to college but was told by his high school counselor that he couldn't, because he was undocumented.

"I was the first in my family to graduate from high school, so that was a big thing for my mom," the soft-spoken 23-year-old said recently. "But I didn't know what was my future. So, I worked cutting lettuce in the fields for six or seven months."

Martinez's future would not end in the fields. Today, he is the co-founder of Community Leaders Organizing Undocumented Dreamers, or CLOUD. The nascent group has already held two large outreach events for immigrants interested in applying for President Barack Obama's new deferred action program, which allows young illegal immigrants to avoid deportation for at least two years and apply for work permits and driver's licenses.

The core group, formed about three months ago, is collaborating with organizations such as Catholic Charities to help educate people about the law and screen them for eligibility. And the group's young leaders are determined to help more people, with the goal of working toward wide-ranging changes in immigration law.

"We are fighting for something bigger than just deferred action," said group co-leader Jose Juan Reyes, 21, who emigrated from Mexico with the help of a "coyote" when he was 8 years old. His mother was detained three times at the border before getting through on her own. "We are fighting for comprehensive immigration reform, which includes us, our parents, and something that would lead to citizenship for us."

Martinez's journey from lettuce picker to immigration rights activist was helped by a combination of timing and ambition.

In 2008, he heard about AB540, which exempts qualifying illegal immigrants from paying higher out-of-state fees at state colleges. He enrolled at Hartnell College in Salinas and cofounded a group to help undocumented students, "Mas Fe," or "more faith."

Later, he transferred to San Francisco City College, where he got involved in a group for the undocumented, Students Advocating for Equity, or SAFE. Soon afterward, Martinez said he and a friend formed the first community college resource center for undocumented students, Voices of Immigrants Demonstrating Achievement, or VIDA.

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"I've been organizing for five years with the undocumented movement," said Martinez, who moved to Richmond about a year ago and began a civic engagement internship with the Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization in June. The internship was funded in part through a Dream Summer Scholarship.

It began three days after Obama announced the country would provide temporary "deferred action" work permits and protection from deportation to immigrants who were younger than 30 and had entered the country illegally before age 16. More than 82,000 people have applied for the permits since the program was announced a month ago.

The announcement opened a world of possibilities for Martinez. His internship supervisors were excited about the law and asked him to help spread the word.

"This was a hot topic -- a new topic," Martinez recalled. "They said: 'Your job is to start a new group.'"

The leaders' infectious spirit inspired Dina Barriere, 22, who came to California at age 3 from El Salvador. She said her immigration status never seemed to be an issue until she realized she couldn't get a driver's license.

"That's when my whole world came crashing down and I figured I wasn't going to amount to anything," she said.

Later, she enrolled in San Francisco City College, where she met Martinez.

"Carlos has gotten me to where I am now in terms of leadership-building skills, because he saw that I had the potential," she said.

"Now, he's created such a big movement in Richmond."

Adam Kruggel, executive director of the interfaith organization, said CLOUD is a testament to the young immigrants' passion and integrity.

"In my opinion, this is part of a movement for freedom that has really captured the hearts and imagination of the country," he said. "I am so excited about the future of this country when you look at them and see how committed they are to the idea of America -- especially when America did not welcome them with open arms -- and see that they fought and fought to have a rightful place here. It's only going to make our country a better place."

Martinez said the response has been incredible.

"What got me was, we met for less than a month and we were able to pull off this event and 300 people showed up," he said. "It was all youths who took ownership and decided, 'We're going to educate the community.' That's not going to go away for me. I was surprised. I was shocked. It was so beautiful."

Staff writer Matt O'Brien contributed to this report. About AB 540

The bill allows some undocumented students to be exempt from paying higher out-of-state tuition at state public colleges and universities if they attended a California high school for three or more years, received a California high school diploma or equivalent, and submitted an affidavit to the college or university declaring that they meet the above requirements and have filed an application to adjust their immigration status or intend to file one.

California Dream Act

The act gives illegal immigrants access to need-based, state-funded scholarships in the fall and Cal Grants and other state financial aid in 2013-14.

FEDERAL DEFERRED ACTION

It allows young illegal immigrants to seek temporary work permits, protection from deportation and a California driver's license.

Two-year, renewable work permits are for immigrants 30 or younger as of June 15 and who brought to the United States illegally before age 16.

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To qualify, immigrants must be in school, have earned a high school diploma or equivalent, or served in the military. Applicants cannot have committed any serious crimes and must have lived in the country continuously since 2007. A \$465 fee is required.

Details about deferred action and how to apply are available by calling 800-375-5283 or by going to www.uscis.gov/childhoodarrivals. Details about the California Dream Act are at www.csac.ca.gov/dream_act.asp.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, California Dream Network, MALDEF

About **CLOUD**

Full name: Community Leaders **Organizing** Undocumented **Dreamers**

Mission statement: "We are a coalition of undocumented leaders and allies in the Bay Area. We work to empower and educate the community of our struggles, collectively striving to achieve equity."

Learn more: The **organization** is affiliated with the Contra Costa Interfaith SupDetails are available by going to Facebook.com/bayareacloud and Twitter.com/bayareacloud or <http://ccisco.org>. Some **CLOUD** members also are part of the California Dream Network, www.cadreamnetwork.org.

Coverage: For details, including links to video clips of **CLOUD** members, go to the On Assignment blog at IBAbuzz.com/onassignment.

Graphic

Community Leaders **Organizing** Undocumented **Dreamers** (C.L.O.U.D.) member Jose Juan Reyes speaks at a **CLOUD** Deferred Action Forum at St. Marks Catholic Church in Richmond, Calif. (Courtesy of CCISCO)

Leaders Carlos Martinez, left, and Jose Juan Reyes of Community Leaders **Organizing** Undocumented **Dreamers** (**CLOUD**) and community organizer Claudia Jimenez discuss future plans for the **group** since the Dream Act was passed during a meeting at Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting **Organization** (CCISCO) office in Richmond, Calif., on Friday, Sept. 14, 2012. (Ray Chavez/Staff)

Community organizer Claudia Jimenez, left, and leaders Carlos Martinez, center, and Jose Juan Reyes of Community Leaders **Organizing** Undocumented **Dreamers** (**CLOUD**) discuss future plans for the **group** since the Dream Act was passed during a meeting at Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting **Organization** (CCISCO) office in Richmond, Calif., on Friday, Sept. 14, 2012. (Ray Chavez/Staff)

Community organizer Claudia Jimenez, right, and leaders Carlos Martinez, left, and Jose Juan Reyes of Community Leaders **Organizing** Undocumented **Dreamers** (**CLOUD**) discuss future plans for the **group** since the Dream Act was passed during a meeting at Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting **Organization** (CCISCO) office in Richmond, Calif., on Friday, Sept. 14, 2012. (Ray Chavez/Staff)

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Immigration movement: 'Dreamers' organize CLOUD group to help others avoid deportation

Subject: **IMMIGRATION** (90%); HIGH SCHOOLS (90%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (89%); **IMMIGRATION** LAW (89%); ALIEN SMUGGLING (89%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (78%); TERRITORIAL & NATIONAL BORDERS (78%); **DEPORTATION** (77%); CITIZENSHIP (77%); SMUGGLING (77%); ASSOCIATIONS & **ORGANIZATIONS** (77%); EMIGRATION (77%); COMMUNITY COLLEGES (76%); COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES (75%); ACADEMIC COUNSELING (71%); LICENSES & PERMITS (71%); EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION EMPLOYEES (71%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2012 (66%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2008 (66%); RELIEF **ORGANIZATIONS** (64%); RELIGION (64%); CHARITIES (50%); DRIVERS LICENSES (50%); CATHOLICS & CATHOLICISM (50%)

Industry: HIGH SCHOOLS (90%); COMMUNITY COLLEGES (76%); COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES (75%); DRIVERS LICENSES (50%)

Person: BARACK OBAMA (50%)

Geographic: SALINAS, CA, USA (92%); ARIZONA, USA (79%); CALIFORNIA, USA (79%); MEXICO (92%); UNITED STATES (79%); NORTH AMERICA (79%)

Load-Date: September 20, 2012

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