

Dreamers to fight for immigration reform alongside their parents

Posted on December 3, 2012 By [Griselda Nevarez Dreamers](#)

Empowered by their recent victory of the federal program that defers their deportation and grants them work permits, dreamers have decided to embark on a daring mission to fight alongside their parents for an immigration reform.

They made that decision Sunday during the [United We Dream National Congress](#), which brought together the largest gathering of dreamers to date. The annual conference ran from Friday to Sunday in Kansas City, Missouri.

The next fight for dreamers

Over the weekend, Lorella Praeli, the advocacy director of the United We Dream Network, stood on stage next to her mother, Chela, in front of 600 dreamers. She publicly declared her commitment to the next fight in the dreamers' movement and asked dreamers to join her.

"I am ready for the long road, for the long, hard fight to stand beside my mom as we fight for a life of dignity and respect for the 11 million who still live in fear of deportation," she told dreamers who traveled from all across the country to attend the conference.

Praeli also told them the new federal program dubbed [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals](#) (DACA), which President Barack Obama announced this summer, is not enough. The program benefits up to 1.7 million undocumented young immigrants ages 30 and under, leaving out a large portion of the undocumented population in the United States.

Coming into the conference, dreamers were given a choice of whether they wanted to continue fighting for the DREAM Act, legislation that would pave a pathway to citizenship for undocumented youth, or push for a broad immigration reform.

A majority of the United We Dream Network's 47 affiliates voted Sunday to go for an immigration reform that provides a pathway to citizenship not only for dreamers but also for their parents.

They also voted to change the narrative of their stories. For years, dreamers have centered their stories around how they were brought to the U.S. when they were children, have grown up feeling as American as anybody else and could become contributing citizens given the chance.

Now, they want to make it known that they are not only fighting for citizenship for themselves but also for their parents and for those who don't qualify for deferred action.

“It’s time for our parents to fight with us, because we cannot leave them behind,” one dreamer from Arkansas said during the United We Dream National Congress.

A dreamer from New York joined in saying, “It’s about time that we ask our mothers and fathers what their dreams are.”

Dreamers see political opportunity

The new direction dreamers decided to take moving forward in a different than what they chose in 2010.

Back then, dreamers felt it was clear that an immigration reform wasn’t going to pass. Therefore, they decided to push for the [DREAM Act](#) as a stand-alone bill even if it meant straying from what national organizations and Latino member of congress supported, which included keeping the DREAM Act in the proposed immigration reform.

But seeing a political opportunity this year to pass a broader legislation that would benefit more undocumented immigrants, dreamers have decided to change the direction they’ll take moving forward.

“This year, we are seeing a complete different momentum after the elections,” Felipe Matos, a dreamer from Florida, told VOXXI. “That’s why we agreed that we want to go after immigration reform as a whole.”

“But if that door closes, we will definitely pursue the DREAM Act as a stand-alone at that point,” he added.

Jose Antonio Vargas, the undocumented journalist who came out about his immigration status through an article published in the New York Times, commended dreamers for the direction they’ve decided to take.

“We have to look at the bigger picture, and I think now is the time to do it,” he told VOXXI. “It’s the perfect time to do it, and I think the dreamers are the perfect messengers to deliver the message, to make this compassionate, to make it about people and to make it not about politics.”

Frank Sharry, executive director of America’s Voice, told VOXXI it is logical that dreamers will “be at the forefront” of the battle to pass an immigration reform considering what they’ve been able to accomplish this year.

“This is an authentic movement of undocumented immigrants,” he told VOXXI. “They’ve come out in a way that’s made themselves visible, and as a result, powerful rather than imperiled.”

Arriving at a decision wasn’t easy

Though there was a consensus among dreamers about the direction they want to take moving forward, there was some tension in the decision-making process.

One Texas dreamer spoke out Saturday saying he and other dreamers felt rushed to decide on their next initiative and weren't given enough time to analyze other options.

Another dreamer from California said he and his peers felt pressured by the leadership from the [United We Dream Network](#) to vote to move in a direction that the leadership had already chosen.

Others felt they were being asked to choose between fighting for themselves by pushing for the [DREAM Act](#) and fighting for their parents by pushing for an immigration reform.

Seeing people's frustration, Cristina Jimenez, managing director of United We Dream Network, got on stage and apologized for making dreamers feel that way. She explained that leaders from the organization had visited 39 of the 47 affiliates in 30 days prior to the United We Dream National Congress to hear what dreamers wanted to do moving forward.

"Our intention was to hear you and to listen to you so that this weekend we could come into alignment as to how we are going to move forward," Jimenez told dreamers. "But what we saw this morning showed to our team and myself that, that intention was not executed right."

After further discussions, the affiliates regrouped and voted unanimously to unite parents to the dreamers' movement and fight for an immigration reform.

Sharry, who was present for much of the United We Dream Congress, commended dreamers for the way they handled the tension and said he's never seen a group operate that way.

"The way they made their decision in a transparent and democratic fashion and the unity that came out of the process is going to produce an enormous surge of power for the effort to get across the finish line," he told VOXXI. "I think it's transformational and historic what happened here this weekend."

Read more: <http://www.voxxi.com/dreamers-immigration-reform-parents/#ixzz2EHiiKHQb>