

By Kelly Herrington

# America's Children

Each year, more than 65,000 undocumented students graduate from US high schools. Many have postsecondary aspirations, yet few have the financial resources to pursue higher education. And a significant number of undocumented students never know that college is an option. Advocates and resources exist to help undocumented students, yet a great deal more are needed. Many college admission counselors and guidance counselors want to help, yet feel isolated and alone. Current laws and regulations can confound and anger these potential allies, but they need to be understood and changed.

Many of us in the admission and college counseling professions can share a story—"that story"—the one that lingers with you late at night and hits you at the most visceral level. For me, "that story" occurred more than 12 years ago in my first week on the job as an admission counselor. A young woman sat across from me with tears in her eyes as she described working two jobs to help her family while earning straight A's, but feared college, due to her undocumented status, was not a reality. She had done everything her school and her community had asked of her. She was bright; she was resilient; she was kind. Our treatment of her in

break down and eliminate the walls they face. One undocumented student with whom I work recently stated: "undocumented students are everyone's neighbors, baby sitters, students, volunteers. We have dined at America's tables, played with America's sons and daughters, gone to the movies and taken the SAT along side America's children. We, too, are America's children. We, too, are America's future. If we can go to college, we will have even greater ability to give back to this nation we love and we know so well." All of us in the school counseling and college admission professions must ask ourselves: "What do we want for our own

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America's higher education system was anything but compassionate. Her last words to me after her interview ended were: "I know I am going to hit a brick wall, but thank you for stopping to chat with me along the way. I am better than what I am being given."

I suspect collectively we could tell hundreds and thousands of "stories" about undocumented students who face insurmountable barriers to education. If we do not pass along our "best practices" to each other—if we do not support each other, and, yes, if we do not push each other to work harder, then the amazing future contributions of our undocumented students will not unfold. We are not alone in our attempt to assist these students. But we have a lot to do. And it is worth it. Our undocumented students are "better than what they are being given," and we have to help

children?" Undocumented students are America's children and they deserve the same opportunities. We must employ and honor the resilience, strength, courage, intelligence, and compassion we have learned from working with undocumented students by fighting for their inclusion. Our children, America's children, deserve nothing less.



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