The story of a migrant youth organizer
Mr. Rishi Singh, Desis Rising up and Moving (DRUM), New York
Youth perspectives; voices of change
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Greetings,

My name is Rishi Singh and I am a leader at DRUM- Desis Rising Up & Moving. Founded in 2000, DRUM is the largest migrant rights organization of low-income South Asian migrant workers, families and are one of the fastest growing migrant populations in the U.S. In New York City, South Asians make up 22% of the one million undocumented migrants, second to Latinos at 27%.

It is a great honor for me to speak here today but there are millions of others whose stories deserve to be heard as well so I am not here only representing myself but those that do not have this opportunity. I was born in Trinidad and Tobago but due to my family wanting a better life for my younger brother and I, we migrated to Canada. We lived in Canada during the late 1980 for 3 years before we were faced with deportation and ended up going back to Trinidad. However, my father frequently traveled to the United States to work for months at a time to help support our family. We eventually decided that

we would all go to the U.S. so that our family can stay together.

We came to the U.S in 1995 when I was 10 years old. Like every immigrant family we were faced with many struggles including finding jobs, places to live, paying our bills and putting food on the table. My mother is a domestic worker and has faced exploitative working conditions due to her undocumented status. My father, who passed away 3 years ago, worked for minimum wage for most of his life. He was in constant fear of his immigration status being discovered, losing his job, and or facing deportation again. There were times when he was literally afraid to go to work when worker verification policies were being talked about as part of federal legislation. Policies that deter, prevent and or criminalize workers for trying to support their families have no place in immigration policies.

I did not realize what it meant to be undocumented until I was graduating from High School and had to apply to colleges. I soon realized that because I was undocumented, I would not be able to get scholarships, financial aid, and loans. This meant that I could not go to the colleges I wanted to because I could not afford it even though I had graduated the top of my class. It is estimated that over 65,000 undocumented students graduate High school every year. They are faced with the same barriers to their

education. Being from working class families it is sometimes hard to even afford to go to college which forces many youth into low wage work in order to support their families.

It was at this point that I was introduced to DRUM. Being undocumented can be very isolating but being in DRUM I soon realized that I was not alone. It became my mission to work towards making sure families and young people do not have to go through what I had to go through but also understanding that there were people that have gone through much worse. I was a Youth Organizer at DRUM building the leadership of hundreds of other immigrant youth in order to change policies that affected our lives. I helped to spearhead Education not Deportation Campaign through leading community research projects, grassroots campaigns to win rights for immigrant students in NYC public school system and push for fair and just immigration reform nationally.

I have lived in the United States for 17 years as an undocumented immigrant but recently was granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). This was an executive order enacted by President Obama that allows undocumented youth who have been in the U.S before the age of 16 and are under 30 years to apply for Deferred action Status. This means while they are granted Deferred Action these young people will not be in danger of being deported and will be able to get work authorization. DACA is valid for two years and is renewable. This has allowed many undocumented children to work, get drivers licenses, apply for credit cards and many more opportunities that were not available to them previously. This was a testament to all the work young people from acros(20)5.9(13)]TJ /TT8 1

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