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More Than What's On Paper: Working Towards The American Dream

**Grads of LifeVoice**Build A Stronger Talent Pipeline [FULL BIO](#) ✓

Yoka Acosta, Grads of Life

Not long ago, I saw a clear future; a future that mirrors my hard work and dedication. Today, my future appears blurred and uncertain.

I immigrated to the United States when I was just three years old and I have been living in Chicago since then. It is the only place that I can call home.

My mother has always stressed the importance of education and ethics, and she taught me that nothing in this world is impossible – “if you want it, you can achieve it.” I dreamed of becoming a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) for a Fortune 500 company. I believed that all it took to reach my goal was to go to a good school, study hard, and earn good grades. But as a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient I was ineligible to receive financial aid for college. During my senior year of high school, while my friends were applying to universities, I was applying to community colleges and sending out my resume to local businesses as I had to pay for my educational cost out-of-pocket.

After my high school graduation, I began working full-time at a local sandwich shop while taking on a full-time course load at a nearby community college. A year later, I started a new job as a Bank Teller, proved myself, and shortly thereafter was promoted to Supervisor. My career achievements, though notable, were not satisfying. At twenty years old, I thought I had advanced as far as I could. I felt my dream of becoming a CPA slowly fading and then I heard about Year Up.





I saw the opportunity to join Year Up as a way to become financially stable and become a role model for my younger siblings and my community. During my time at Year Up, I grew as a professional and as a leader. I expanded my financial operations knowledge and began using my voice to support social causes that I cared deeply about. I am now working at Thorne Associates as a Staff Accountant.

My story is just one example of the ambition and determination that DACA recipients (also known as DREAMers) possess. My DACA status gave me hope of creating a brighter future for myself and my family. Through DACA, I was able to obtain a full-time job, attend college, and enroll in Year Up. Without DACA, myself, along with 800,000 other determined and ambitious individuals, would be forced into the shadows.

Like most DREAMers, I am an American by most standards, but especially at heart. I pay taxes, abide by the laws that govern this country, and apply a high level of work ethic and ambition toward achieving my goals. I am proud of my Latinx roots, but I am grateful to this country for the opportunity to pursue my dreams; an opportunity that, I hope, will continue to be provided to me and the hundreds of thousands of others like me.