

### ***"How I Got Here: Maria—Student-focused Video"***

Maria: Are you all ready? Yes? Okay.

Hello everyone, my name's Maria and I attend the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, and I am undocumented.

Here we go.

My major is environmental science. I think it's very important that we take care of our environment. I love being in nature because I love being out and exploring. I was born in Durango, Mexico. I come from a single-parent family, my mom, she actually only had a elementary level education, but that didn't deter her from telling her kids that we should go to college. I was brought over to the United States when I was eight years old. I came not knowing a lot of English and it was very hard adjusting to the culture. I felt rejected by people I didn't even know. Sometimes you think about like, oh my God, what if somebody finds out I'm undocumented? You think of, maybe all my efforts are going to go to waste.

In the next part, check out how Maria transforms from defeated to activated once she knows her college dream is possible. Armed with this realization, she doesn't let anything derail her, and works hard to get to college, not being defined whatsoever by her undocumented status.

When I was in my junior year of high school, I thought I could not take my SAT because I did not have a social security number. I was very mad at the world, I was mad at my mom because I was like, "Ma, you did this to me," like I can't go to college. My GEAR UP program had SAT sessions that would help you prep up for the test. My GEAR UP facilitator comes in and he's like, "Maria, how come you haven't taken your SAT?" I was like, do I tell him that I'm undocumented or do I not tell him and not go to college? I decided to tell him right there and then, "You know what, it's because I don't have a social."

Then my facilitator's like, "Well, Maria, you don't need one," so I was like, "What!? I don't need one?" Right there and then I signed up for my SAT. My dream university was Purdue University and I was so ready to go to Purdue but I had this limitation because of my immigration status so I couldn't leave my area. I ended up going to the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and it's been a blessing to be here locally.

This is Bucky. This is the engineer building, this is my dorm right here. Hey.

When I got deferred action for childhood arrivals, it felt like all the doors had opened. Deferred action for childhood arrivals gives students who came to the United States before the age of sixteen the opportunity to apply for a two year permit. You get to be

in the country for two years, legally. [inaudible 00:07:04] for me, it has given me so many opportunities.

Right now, I'm along the US/Mexico border and it feels kind of surreal to be so close to it and not be afraid. I feel freedom, I feel like a butterfly, they have no boundaries, they migrate from country to country. Even though I do have a lack of immigration status, it does not deter me from pursuing my dreams.

If you are an undocumented student, these are the steps you have to take. First, you have to take your college entrance exams. The second step is applying to a university. Once you know if you have been accepted or not, then you should definitely try to apply for financial aid, and you're going to do the FAFSA application, so that's financial aid from the state of Texas undocumented students. Being undocumented does not define who you are. You are your own person and you know what you want to do, you know where you come from, and you know where you want to go, there's people out there looking out for your success.

Your success really depends on how bad you want it and what difference you want to make in the world. Never give up. If your parents never gave up to give you a better life, you should never give up to give yourself a better life.