

Dear Fearless Dreamers Alliance Members,

My name is Karina Alvarez-Espinoza and I am the founder of Fearless Dreamers Alliance (FDA). I was brought to the United States at the age of 4 years old, along with my mom. Up until I was 18 years old, I was fully undocumented. It was not until 2017 that I received, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). I received DACA right before starting college. I did not know what to do or if I could even go to college, which is probably a thought many undocumented and DACAmented students have. I decided to come to CLC. Let me tell you, that was the best decision I ever made! I learned a lot and saved money.

During my time at CLC, I met other students who were in the same boat; DACA and completely undocumented. I also met many great staff members and advisors that helped me navigate college, and I will forever be grateful to them for their support and guidance. As I looked at schools to transfer to in my third year, I began thinking about what schools have resources its undocumented and DACAmented students. I began to realize that some of these schools had clubs completely dedicated to undocumented students. I began to think “how come CLC doesn’t have a club like that?” I brought it up to the CLC UndocuAllies committee (a group of staff, faculty, and some students working toward making CLC a welcoming school for undocumented students). They said that was something they too have been thinking of but they needed a student willing to step up and lead it. I knew that this was greatly needed, so I decided to start a club. It was not easy. I had a lot of support from my friends and the CLC UndocuAllies committee as well. We started the process in Fall 2019. In Spring 2020, Fearless Dreamers Alliance was born. Our first semester I served as the President of the club. We had many great things planned and had our first fundraiser, indoor garage sale, all were a success! Unfortunately, we did not get to execute all of our events that we had planned due to the COVID-19 crisis hitting us in March 2020. However, we continued with events. As I write this letter, it is summer 2020 and I am transferring schools next fall. It is hard to leave knowing we did not get the chance to do all the amazing things we planned, but I have hope that the future will bring great things!

There were many reasons why I decided to be the student to step up to creating the club. First, I know that the experience of navigating higher education as an undocumented student is not easy. I believe that we needed a space where students felt safe, supported, and had access to information and resources. As I mentioned, we had many ideas at the beginning and in creating the club I had some things in mind. Here are some of the things that I envisioned for the club:

- The foundation has a Dreamers' scholarship, but it would be great if the club could start another scholarship. We could always use more scholarships! Another idea is that this fund could be a general fund to assist students with DACA renewals, legal fees, emergencies, etc.
- An end of the year gala or event would be a great way to celebrate the end of the year and fundraise money.
- High school visits to connect with high school students is essential to inform them that they can pursue higher education.
- Create an informational packet consisting of a compiled list of CLC and local resources to distribute to high schools, students, counselors, during club fairs, at events, etc.
- Create a mentorship program with 1) high schools for CLC students to mentor high school students, or 2) 2nd/3rd year CLC students mentor 1st year CLC students, or 3) connect with DACA/undocumented professionals to be our mentors.
- Advocacy - learning how to advocate for our community. This can include voter engagement (even if we can't vote we can influence others that can), peaceful protests/demonstrations, going to the capital to speak to representatives about immigration policies, knowing your rights workshops, workshops on immigration policy updates etc.
- Participate in college visits to colleges that are undocumented student friendly institutions such as: Northeastern Illinois University, Northern University, and University of Illinois Chicago, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign.

These are only some of the ideas I had for the club in the future. Ultimately, I hope that one day there will not be a need for this club. I hope that one day all students are citizens and won't need to go through all these hardships that come with being undocumented. Please know that I am always someone you can come to for help or advice. I hope to keep up with the club as much as I can.

Best wishes,

Karina Alvarez Espinoza