

In a hurry to get his mother to work in the family car, he ran a stoplight. Caught for the infraction, he had to admit to driving without a license. The ticket was a huge amount for someone employed only seasonally as gardener. He scraped together the money by borrowing from friends and family; still, the underlying problem—lack of driver’s license—he was powerless to resolve.

She escaped an abusive husband, taking her two small children with her. With the help of an organization like COMEA she moved away for a fresh start. She found a modest apartment, work at a Cheyenne motel, a used car to get to work and back. One day in the wee hours ICE agents showed up at her home, put handcuffs around her, and threw her into a holding cell. Soon she was in a federal facility in Nebraska. Her children, terrified, were left clueless. Their mother’s overarching fear: Would the abuser show up to demand custody?

Why did “Carlos” and “Rosa” get into these fixes? They live the twilight existence of youthful but undocumented workers. As such, Rosa is barred from employment authorization; Carlos cannot attain a driver’s license. Still, she drove to work; he chauffeured his parents for fear of what would happen if his father or mother were stopped for a traffic violation—his parents aren’t fluent in English.

The young people have lived in Wyoming for years. They attended public schools and graduated from high school. Their children, born here, are U.S. citizens. They manage rent payments, finance their livelihoods, pay payroll tax—in some cases, income taxes as well—and contribute to the functioning of the Cheyenne community. They would like to enroll at LCCC and earn degrees as auto mechanics, dental hygienists, or whatnot. Without a driver’s license, they don’t dare undertake the commute.

Remarkably, today the possibility exists for some of the Rosas and Carloses of this world to put an end to their shadow lives. President Obama’s DACA, “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals,” empowers at least some to step out from under their burden with head held high. Frustrated by a congress that stonewalled the DREAM act, the president issued DACA as directive but stopped short of making it an executive order.

Undocumented workers represent nationalities from Russian to Filipino. Often they arrived in the U.S. under work or student visas they were unable to renew.

Who qualifies? Here’s a thumbnail sketch:

Young people under 31 as of June 15, 2012, who

- Came to the U.S. while under 16 and have resided here since June 15, 2007;
- Entered without inspection before June 15, 2012, were in the United States on that date or on the date of request;

- Are currently in school or have graduated from high school;
- Have attained a GED or have been honorably discharged from the Coast Guard or armed forces;
- Are free of felony conviction or significant misdemeanor or more than three misdemeanors.

Applicants must provide documentary evidence of the criteria and pass a background check. They may apply, even if in removal proceedings or under final orders of removal.

DACA is enforced by Homeland Security; hence, state officials unfriendly to Obama—we have our share in Wyoming—are not inclined to further the cause. A range of volunteers seek to ensure that those who qualify attain information and help. In Cheyenne, one faith-based community responded unstintingly, with generosity and compassion: Unitarian Universalist Church.

Instrumental, too, were Northern Colorado's American Friends and the Fort Collins Community Action Network. Attorney Kim Baker-Medina served pro bono to help youngsters negotiate the maze leading to their liberation.

The stalwart folks recently created a United Universalist workshop of eight workstations, found professionals who donated their time, offered lunches and fundraisers. First, urgent worries needed to be addressed: "Will I get my parents into trouble?" How to ensure parents aren't retaliated against if their children come forth?

"Without [church member] Sandi Gaulke's leadership, we would have been lost," says Volunteer Carol Pascal.

The volunteers also extend themselves to people outside the state who lack access to a network.

"We received a desperate call from a young man jailed in Georgia, scheduled for deportation," says Ms Pascal. "He understood he qualified but didn't know what to do. We connected him with a church in Atlanta who could help."

Filling out the required paperwork—the Table of Contents shows well over 70 pages—and submitting appropriate documentation is a daunting task. It needs much patience and support from the helpers. Then there is the fee, a hefty chunk of \$465, plus other costs (photos, fingerprints, birth certificates, etc.)

Rosa and Carlos sweated bullets while the jury was out. What if they'd exposed themselves via application but their cases were still in the pipeline when/if DACA was repealed? Would they be deported? Some youngsters hardly speak any Spanish. Deportation would mean they'd be ostracized in a country that's far from home and belittled as "gringos" in the job line. Yearning to return to U.S. friends and family (not to

mention their young children), they would have been forced from one shadow existence into another.

As Mitt Romney ran against an incumbent Obama, he pledged to rescind DACA on the day he took office. It was one of many remarks that made him appear out of touch with American working-class life. Many voters opted for Obama, despite dismay and frustration over earlier presidential decisions, because he stood firm on issues that benefit working families. An estimated 1.4 million children and young adults qualify under DACA.

I'm happy to report, Carlos and Rosa are on their way to attaining their longed-for status. Soon they'll be able to take an active role in shaping their future.

Still, it's a modest beginning. "President Obama's DACA is helpful for many undocumented youth and young adults," says Sandi Gaulke. "But passage of the DREAM Act is essential to rectifying an unjust and discriminatory immigration system."