

Astrid Silva

Astrid arrived in Nevada with her family at the age of 5 after immigrating from Mexico just a year prior. Astrid became a proud Hancock Hawk, then a Garside Gladiator. She applied at Advanced Technologies Academy despite believing that she would not be able to graduate high school because of her undocumented status. In 2006, when it finally came time for graduation, she was confronted with the fact that she might not be able to further her education. Still, Astrid applied to colleges both in and out of Nevada and outside of the United States; she was denied entry to all of them. Thanks to the support of her family and the educators in her life, she was able to enroll at the College of Southern Nevada. As a first-generation student she struggled to navigate the complexities of college and due to her immigration status, she shied away from seeking resources that were available, including the Millennium Scholarship which she was eligible for but didn't use. Astrid and her family did everything they could from babysitting jobs to landscaping to save up money to pay each semester in cash.

While at College of Southern Nevada, she received guidance through her counselor and the Hispanic Student Union that in 2009 led to an encounter with an unlikely ally, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. She began getting more deeply involved in the politics surrounding the DREAM Act and became the poster child for the legislation. At the time, she was one of only a handful of students, who had so publicly revealed their undocumented identity and status. She continued her advocacy and was determined to find a solution for herself and others, in 2012 President Barack Obama announced Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) thanks to the work of DREAMers and allies like Senator Reid. The program would enable DREAMers to have temporary relief from deportation, a social security number and the ability to work for two years. Just six months after the creation of the DACA program and six years after having begun college she received her first degree, an Associate of Arts from College of Southern Nevada.

Having DACA enabled Astrid to expand her advocacy, she and a small group of dedicated DREAMers and allies formed DREAM Big Vegas, a club that aimed to educate the community about issues facing DREAMers and their families particularly in access to higher education. While in its infancy, the club received national acclaim for its work with DREAMers in Nevada, making it one of the states with the highest percentage of eligible population to successfully apply for DACA. At the state level in her advocacy work she pushed for laws that helped immigrants like her parents and others receive driver authorization cards, something that held back many of her fellow students. Astrid yet again applied to university, where she faced the same hurdles because of her immigration status.

At the suggestion of a friend who was a college recruiter she applied to Nevada State College where she was immediately accepted for Fall 2013. At Nevada State College Astrid found a home on campus, a place where she could be safe and be like every other student yearning

to learn. During this time, she was made aware that because of all the credits she had earned in her years at College of Southern Nevada she was to be awarded an Associate of General Studies and an Associate of Science. While advocating for DREAMers Astrid met the team at TheDream.US, a scholarship for DACA recipients that awarded full rides to college. Nevada was not eligible for the grant at the time. She shared her love of Nevada State College with the team, in particular Don Graham, their founder. Don encouraged her to apply for the scholarship even though she was in her last semester, over the months they talked more about Nevada State College and how valuable the campus made Astrid feel, despite being undocumented. Several months into their conversations and nearing Astrid's graduation, Don surprised Astrid that since she was no longer eligible for the scholarship, he would be awarding one open scholarship to Nevada State College. Astrid's dream of making college accessible for others was becoming a reality. After connecting TheDream.US with Nevada State College officials, it was determined that the institution would be receiving not one, but seven full ride scholarships; to date there are now 107 active Nevada scholars.

In summer of 2016, after 11 years of saving up money, getting rides from friends to campus, extremely understanding professors, rejection after rejection and having to drop her double minor because of an uncomfortable election, Astrid finally received her Bachelor in History with an emphasis in Pre-Law.

During this time, Astrid has also received local and national acclaim for her work while continuing to risk speaking out about her status. In 2014 she was named Youth Immigrant of the Year for the American Immigration Council, was named a rising Civil Rights leader by the Los Angeles Times, introduced President Obama at Del Sol High School when he presented his DAPA (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans) Executive Action to protect undocumented parents and then went on to testify before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary to defend the same action. In 2016 she was one of the first undocumented speakers for the Democratic National Convention, she delivered the first Spanish language Democratic response to President Trump's first speech to Congress in 2017, she was named People En Espanol's Poderosas 2020 among other accolades.

In 2017 Silva founded Dream Big Nevada, an organization inspired by DREAM Big Vegas, to help fellow undocumented youth gain access to higher education. The organization became a vital lifeline to undocumented and immigrant communities during COVID providing them with access to testing, vaccines and other methods of survival. Most recently, Astrid became the first director of the new Clark County School District initiative; UNIFY - Undocumented and Immigrant Family and Youth Success Services, which aims to help children just like herself navigate the educational system, no matter where they come from.

She continues to raise her voice and empower others so that together they can achieve their goal – keeping families, like hers, protected.