

*"I didn't come here for the money.  
I came here to realize the dreams of my daughter."  
-Carlos Figueroa*

### **Children in Immigrant Families**

Currently, about 20 percent of young people in the United States are born to immigrant parents (Chaudry et al., 2010). Of those 5.5 million children, 4.5 million are U.S. born citizens (Passel, D'Vera Cohn, & Center, 2011; Yoshikawa, Kholoptseva, & Suárez-Orozco, 2013). As such, most children in immigrant families have a different immigration status than their parents. Demographers predict that by 2040 that number will increase to one in three children growing up in an immigrant household (Rong & Preissle, 1998). While the population of children in immigrant families continues to increase, anti-Latino immigrant sentiment and record number deportations by the Obama administration are creating detrimental experiences for the next generation (Nava, 2014). From 2008 to 2014, the number of deportations reached 2 million— a record high (Lal, 2013; Torres, 2014). Additionally, for every detained adult, there was one child—who more than likely was a U.S. citizen—left unattended (R. Capps, 2007). As parents face possible deportation, their children are considered neglected and consequently, Child Protective Services (CPS) is mandated to hold them in custody. In 2010, there were an estimated 5,100 children<sup>1</sup> in the foster care system due to immigration raids and subsequent deportations (Wessler, 2011). Furthermore, from 2008 to 2012 the U.S. government detained more than 1,300 children in adult facilities—sometimes for more than a year, including a 15-year old held for a period of ten-years (Center, 2012). The disintegration of the family unit results in additional hardships for these children.

Ultimately, the detention and/or deportation of a parent *is* the disintegration of the family unit. The record high immigration raids translate to an exponential number of children that experience loss and trauma. For instance, as a result of immigration raids in Iowa, 90 percent of Latina/o children reported being too fearful to attend school and over 50 percent of all Latina/o children were absent from school for that reason (Becerra, Androff, Cimino, Wagaman, & Blanchard, 2013). Around the nation, even when children did not experience deportation, they often fear for the security of their families (Dreby, 2012a). The psychological and practical effects of deportation for children include: fear, distrust, depression, anxiety and financial instability (Ayers, 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> At the current rate of deportation, the Center of American Progress predicted that by 2016 there will be an increase of 15,000 more children entering the foster care system (Dreby, 2012a; Garcia, 2013).

In this case study I present the life story of Katherine<sup>2</sup> Figueroa. In 2010, Katherine was a young girl I met while on an immigration delegation from Arizona to Washington D.C. The purpose of the delegation was to testify before Congress and bring national attention to the increased immigration hostility in Arizona. Katherine participated in the congressional discussion and spoke on behalf of children separated from their parents. Her story not only illustrates the implications of local and national immigration policies, but also how the immigration climate necessitated her participation as a child activist.



Katherine Figueroa in Washington D.C. Washington D.C.  
Personal photograph by author.  
2010.  
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### **Methodology**

Few studies have highlighted the voices of children impacted by an enforcement focused immigration system. For that reason, Katherine's story is significant in understanding the narratives of children whose family members are undocumented. These stories provide lived experiences and personal insight into the unintended consequences of stringent immigration policies. Data for this case study comes from multiple in-depth interviews with Katherine, her mother (Sandra Figueroa), her father (Carlos Figueroa), various community members, and five years of participant observation (Zinn Baca, 1979). Participation observation data included notes from meetings, events, marches, and community gatherings related to Katherine's narrative. Once I had gathered the audio recordings, videotape, and written notes from the interviews, I arranged them in chronological order. Then, to better understand the significant events in Katherine's narrative, I compared her story to other similar cases. Prior research on detention and child separation (i.e., R. Capps, 2007; Chaudry et al., 2010; Dreby, 2012a, 2012b; Joanna Dreby, 2010; J. Dreby & Adkins, 2011; Kaskade, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011; Yoshikawa, 2011) helped me understand the ways that Katherine's story was unique and/or similar to what other children experienced.

I find that my positionality as an immigrant ARTivist<sup>3</sup> scholar from Arizona was an integral part of this ethnographic process (Rosaldo, 1993). Stories of

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<sup>2</sup> Katherine's story became a national and local news story, and she became a public figure at the age of nine. Her parents have provided consent to use her real name, pictures, and videos in the media and in this publication. In addition, the University of California Los Angeles Institutional Review Board permitted conduct and publication of this study.

<sup>3</sup> Artist and activist (Sandoval & Latorre, 2008).

familial disintegration have become commonplace in the state, creating detrimental outcomes for the children of undocumented families. Throughout my involvement in issues regarding the Mexican/U.S. border and the immigrant community of Arizona, I gained access to dozens of cases of family separation due to detention and/or deportation. Over the years, I became particularly close to the Figueroa family who became the focal point of the immigration debate in Arizona.

As mentioned above, I originally met Katherine in 2009 when Maricopa County Sheriff's Deputies detained her parents. The following year, my connection to the family solidified when Katherine and I joined a delegation of women and children that traveled to Washington D.C. to testify before Congress on immigration issues. Her message urged policymakers, lobbyists, and political organizers to ["please let me my parents go and stop SB 1070."](#) The interviews in this study span from the time of the detention (2009) until now (2015). During my time outside of Arizona for graduate school, I kept in touch with the family over social media and conducted interviews over the phone and in person when the family visited California. The direct quotes in this study are from recorded interviews with the family, community members, field notes taken immediately after communication, and from a variety of media sources.

When doing research with minors in vulnerable communities it is of the utmost importance to insure the safety and privacy of all individuals involved. As this case gained notoriety through the media, the family was not concerned with anonymity. On the contrary, the more people knew about their story the more they felt protected. Additional public support meant fewer possibilities of deportation. Hence, the family was comfortable with participating in this study and allowing Katherine to share her experience.

As Arizona leads the country in anti-immigrant legislation, it is of particular importance to understand the immigrant experience of children in Arizona. From 2010-2012, more than 31 states proposed similar (or more severe) measures to Arizona's Senate Bill 1070.<sup>4</sup> Such as Alabama's House Bill 56 which makes "harboring"<sup>5</sup> (i.e., living or driving with) undocumented people a crime (Locayo, 2011; Szkupinski-Quiroga, Medina, & Glick, 2013). Thus, paying close attention to Arizona is vital, not only in the context of this story but also in understanding current immigration discourse. Katherine's experience provides a unique perspective on how policies like these impact immigrant communities and young children of immigrants. This account also highlights the importance in community organizing, as not all children without their parents are able to harness resources and support. Indeed, community support is elemental in helping children reunite

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<sup>4</sup> This law (2010) requires police officers in Arizona to determine the legal status of someone who demonstrates "reasonable suspicion" of being in the country without documents.

<sup>5</sup> Harboring a fugitive refers to the crime of knowingly hiding a wanted criminal from the authorities. Federal and state laws, which vary by state, govern the crime of harboring a fugitive.

with their parents. However, this narrative is not meant to generalize the experiences of all children of immigrant families; rather, it provides a distinct understanding of the immigrant experience.

### **Arizona's Immigration Climate**

Katherine was born in Arizona, a state that has become the national spotlight of local immigration policy. To some, it may seem that the “anti-immigrant/immigration problem” manifested overnight. However, as someone who has lived in Arizona since the age of three, I have witnessed the mobilization of people on both sides of the political spectrum. As the country deported more immigrants than ever before,<sup>6</sup> Arizona earned the notorious title of the “laboratory” and “ground zero” for anti-immigrant policies (K. Campbell, 2011). Aligned with the national goal of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to create “attrition through enforcement,” Arizona has passed measures that make immigrant life unbearable and impossible, in hopes that people will “self-deport” (Michaud, 2010).

Multiple punitive measures against undocumented immigrants have passed in the last decade. In 2004, Arizona lawmakers made already restricted resources unavailable to undocumented immigrants, such as, the right to vote in local or national elections and additional verification of legal status when applying for state benefits or public assistance. Proposition 200 made it a misdemeanor for an employee of the state to not report an undocumented person to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)<sup>7</sup> (K. M. Campbell, 2011). In 2005, the “Coyote Law” passed making the already federal felony of smuggling someone across the border (including smuggling of oneself) a local felony (Szkupinski-Quiroga et al., 2013). Unlike the national law on human smuggling, the “Coyote Law” of Arizona does not have a religious exception that protects refugees and asylum seekers (Stern, 2014). This law is a prime example of Arizona's attempts to overstep federal immigration law.

The political climate intensified in 2006 when six propositions that directly targeted the livelihood of undocumented individuals passed. Included on the local ballot were laws that denied bail to people accused of a crime, and made undocumented children and youth ineligible for head-start programs and in-state tuition. Another law made English the official language, and another prohibited undocumented immigrants from taking English or General Educational Development (GED) classes that are subsidized by the state. In 2008, the “Employer Sanction Law”, Proposition 208, passed. Proposition 208 penalized any

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<sup>6</sup> The Obama Administration has deported 2 million immigrants since 2010, more than any other administration (Nava, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Immigration and Customs Enforcement previously known as INS (Immigration and Naturalization Services).

business that knowingly hired undocumented workers (K. Campbell, 2011). However, rather than punishing businesses, worksite raids were normalized as local law enforcement took the place of federal immigration officers through the 287 (g)<sup>8</sup> agreements, and raided businesses, detained undocumented workers, and transferred them to ICE. In 2009, House Bill 2008 required that state employees report to ICE if an undocumented person applied for services through any public program. Lastly, and perhaps most infamously, in 2010 lawmakers passed Senate Bill 1070, which aimed to curb undocumented immigration by legalizing racial profiling of anyone suspected of being undocumented (Szkupinski-Quiroga et al., 2013).

From 2002 until the present day, immigration raids have continued in Arizona on a daily basis (O'Leary, 2014). The state is also home to the self-proclaimed 'America's Toughest Sheriff,' Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Maricopa County. In 2014, Sheriff Arpaio was elected for a sixth term and prides himself on detaining and deporting undocumented immigrants by the thousands. With support from the Department of Homeland Security, and federally funded programs like 287 (g), Secure Communities<sup>9</sup> and the Criminal Alien Program<sup>10</sup> (CAP), immigrants in Arizona of various legal statuses lived in fear of being taken away and separated from their family members (Berk & Schur, 2001; Menjívar, 2006; Menjívar & Abrego, 2012).

Before Senate Bill 1070 gained significant media attention, groups at the grassroots level began organizing in the community. In early 2007, Pruitt's Furniture store hired off duty police officers and retired sheriff's deputies to intimidate and harass day laborers looking for work in the area. During the summer, community organizations began to protest against Pruitt's attempt to intimidate undocumented workers. This campaign was a long and intense battle in the community that made the anti-immigrant sentiment palpable through daily protests, news stories, and legal disputes. *Puente Arizona Human Rights Movement* or *Puente* as they are called in the community, is one of the organizations that fight for immigrant rights in Arizona. *Puente* was established in 2007 during the Pruitt's

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<sup>8</sup> The 287(g) agreement is one of ICE's top partnership initiatives. This program allows and funds state and local law enforcement to enter in agreement with ICE under the joint Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). Under the 287(g) agreement, state and local entities receive authority to act as federal immigration enforcement within a local jurisdiction.

<sup>9</sup> Secure Communities "S-Comm" is a biometric sharing database between ICE, the FBI, and local law enforcement, which captures biometric information of any immigrant that any of these entities meets. Importantly, if an undocumented immigrant is getting questioned for a crime, or is detained due to a broken tail light, his or her information will be sent to ICE and federal authorities.

<sup>10</sup> The Criminal Alien Program (CAP) allows ICE to use and fund local facilities to interview, investigate, and hold undocumented people.

battle that would foreshadow the circumstances that made Katherine an advocate for children of undocumented families.

### **Community's Response to Family Separation**

Throughout the five years I have been a participant observer in the immigrant community, *Puente Arizona* has been one of the main organizations to mobilize against the state legislature and Sheriff Arpaio's mission to deport as many people as possible. Currently, they characterize their mission and role in the community as "part of a global movement for migrant justice". *Puente Arizona* asserts itself as an organization that promotes justice, non-violence, interdependence, and human dignity. The current membership is comprised of "those most impacted by anti-immigrant policies and laws: currently and formerly undocumented people, those in mixed-status families, and people of color affected by rampant racial profiling" (<http://puenteaz.org/>).

The organization came to be when families, professionals, and activists united to organize *Know Your Rights*, creating a space for immigrants to gain control of their experience and neighborhood climate. The *Know Your Rights* workshops also encourage parents to create an emergency plan, which includes a family savings plan and designating who will take care of the children in case of parental absence. This plan specifically includes a notarized document giving temporary custody to a legal guardian chosen by the parents.

Some of the existing programs *Puente* runs are on *Art & Culture*, where they have a media team for youth and adults, a printing press (*Puente Ink*), and an underground library. In this library, people can read and check out books that were banned in Arizona when House Bill 2281<sup>11</sup> was signed into law. There is also a *Community Defense Course* and a clinic where people can apply and renew their Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for Parental Accountability (DAPA) applications. *Escuelita Puente* is another program in which children 5-18 years old can participate in fieldtrips, workshops, and art classes where they can learn about their history and culture. Lastly, *Puente a la Salud* is an initiative through which the public can take part in a community garden, attend yoga classes, and learn about the relationship between racism and health disparities.

For years, *Puente* has operated a helpline that receives hundreds of calls from people who need help and do not know what to do when the sheriff's deputies deport or detain a loved one. Over the period of two years, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Arizona fielded calls specifically on racial profiling due to SB 1070. Within that time period, the number of calls reached well over 6,500 (D. Juarez, personal communication, December 2014).

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<sup>11</sup> HB2281 was a law that banned Ethnic Studies in charter schools and school districts in Arizona. This bill was signed in 2010 by Governor Jan Brewer the year that SB1070 passed (Bean & Stone, 2012; Cabrera, 2012).

In 2009, *Puente* received a phone call from a local grandmother who was worried that Sheriff's deputies had detained her daughter, Sandra, and her son-in-law, Carlos (Katherine's parents) during a [worksite raid](#). This call was of particular concern because the raid left Katherine without her mother *and* father. Katherine's U.S. citizenship further complicated the case given she could not go to Mexico and reunite with her parents if they were deported. As a U.S. citizen, she could not travel or cross international borders without her parent's notarized consent. Moreover, when children with U.S. citizenship are left behind they are turned over to CPS. Otherwise, they enter family detention centers with their parents and can eventually be deported. Katherine, without the presence of her grandmother and aunt would have been obligated to enter the foster care system. From the moment *Puente* was informed of Katherine's case, they mobilized community efforts to help her reunite with her parents.

**“I saw my parents being taken away on T.V.”**

Katherine was at her aunt's house playing outside with a friend when she heard a report on the news about an immigration raid at the Lindstrom Family Car Wash in East Phoenix. She ran inside when she heard the name of her parent's work place and watched her parents get arrested. Katherine's father was cuffed with zip ties and, with his hands tied in front of him, was escorted to a police vehicle. When Katherine recounts what happened, she clearly remembers every detail, “It was breaking news, I was sitting with my aunt, she likes to watch Channel 3, and I saw my dad, I was shocked” (K. Figueroa, Personal communication, 2011). Her parents, along with 25 other people, were detained and faced identity theft charges for using false documents to obtain employment. This meant they could be in jail for up to six months until given trial, then face deportation, or two years of probation.

This specific worksite raid left at least 12 children without one or both parents, recalled Lydia Guzman, then president of *Somos America* –a coalition of immigrants' rights organizations in Arizona (Fernandez, 2011). *Somos America* quickly reached out to the organizations that were part of their coalition. Lawyers, teachers, and families responded to the immigration raid with food, baby formula, funds, and other resources for the children and families. However, no amount of support could console Katherine or the other children left without their parents.

### Left Alone

After witnessing the arrest of her parents, Katherine was devastated and constantly fearful that ICE would deport them. She would sit outside her house waiting for her parents to come home unsure of when she would see them again. In spite of her hopes to be reunited with her parents, their arrival was not going to happen anytime soon as they were in custody at the Maricopa County Correctional Facilities for over three months. All Katherine could think and dream about was her mother and father, and how much she missed them. Most of all, she was fearful of the government forcing her parents to abandon her. Memories of them going to the park, Castles~n~Coaster (a theme park in Arizona), and going to California to see Mickey Mouse, were constantly on her mind. “I remembered those times because we all were together, and we were happy,” she said with sadness in her voice (K. Figueroa, personal communication, 2011).

During those three months, Katherine’s grandmother and aunt alternated as her caretakers. The world that she had known suddenly fell apart. She could no longer concentrate in school and her grades began to suffer. Katherine recalled talking to a school nurse about her situation and what she was feeling at the time. According to her, the school administrators were helpful and considerate in providing additional support during this difficult time. The school specifically hired someone to help children cope with traumatic experiences, such as family separations. Katherine also recalled that many of her classmates were leaving with their families to other states because of the anti-immigration policies, and Sheriff Arpaio’s participation in an exponential number of community and worksite raids.

Katherine tried to visit her mother and father in jail as much as possible, although sometimes no one was available to take her. She recalled, “People had to work, so I could not see my parents even if I wanted to go see them every day”. (K. Figueroa, personal communication, 2011). She stated that the most difficult part of visiting her parents was not being allowed to touch them. This was hard for her because she wanted to run up and hug them. She remembers seeing her mother and father in their striped uniforms filled with sadness and crying because they were apart. Her mother told her that they were not there because they were bad people,



Alexander, A.J. *Sandra Figueroa in Detention*. 2009. *Feet In Two Worlds*,

but because they did not have “papers.” Katherine also experienced posttraumatic symptoms. At night, she had nightmares that the sheriff’s deputies were coming to her aunt’s house to take her and her aunt’s family to jail. This would often disturb her sleep, which subsequently affected her efforts at school. Even when her parents were released three months later the fear did not subside. There were times when Katherine remembers being fearful of going into places such as hospitals and department stores, where she would typically see sheriff deputies patrolling or standing outside. Even now, every time she sees sheriff deputies she feels scared and in danger, as opposed to feeling safe and protected.

### **Trading Barbie Cars for Microphones**

Katherine’s favorite toy was a Barbie car, which she stopped playing with after her parents’ detention. She said, “I did not want to play. I felt lonely and was not in that mood. All I wanted to do was cry for the first week because I knew my parents were suffering. Then, after that week, I decided that instead of crying all the time I was going to help them,” (K. Figueroa, personal communication, 2011).

Katherine is now known as a “poster-child” for children of immigrants and families who are torn apart by the laws and authorities of Arizona. Her first attempt



Fernandez, Valeria. Katherine at Children's March. 2009. *Feet In Two Worlds*, Phoenix.

to capture the attention of the media happened shortly after the Sheriff’s Department detained her parents. Katherine made a video with a message to [President Obama](#). She asked him to understand, as a parent of two young girls himself, what it would be like for him to not be with his family. She asked the President to pass an immigration reform and to release her parents from jail. She stated, “Just get a piece of paper and sign to break SB 1070 and pass an immigration reform now.” Despite the invitation to listen to Katherine’s testimony, President Obama and the First Lady did not attend. Instead, Katherine met with someone from the President’s staff. She was told that they would share her story with the President and that the administration was working on the issue.

In the immigrant rights community, Katherine is regarded as one of the first people to publicly call on President Obama to intervene in a specific immigration case, and to ask for immigration reform or an executive order. Before that, immigrant rights activists focused on targeting Congress for policies that would

legalize youth via the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM Act)<sup>12</sup>. Three years after Katherine's message to the President, the Obama Administration passed Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2012, providing youth with legal status for a period of two years in which they can work and obtain a driver's license (Warren & Kerwin, 2015). Then in 2014, the Obama administration passed Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) another executive action aimed at helping adults with documented children, by providing parents with a two year working permit, similar to DACA (Ham & Camp, 2014; Singer & Svajlenka, 2013). Both policies give temporary protection to a portion of the undocumented population. However, the majority of them do not qualify for DACA or DAPA (Margulies, 2015). Yet, at the time of Katherine's demands, few people imagined that President Obama would grant her and requests of many others for an executive action.

Only one month after her mother and father's detention, in April 2009, Katherine led a [children's march](#) through the streets of Phoenix, Arizona. The children each carried signs and dressed as monarch butterflies, symbolizing migration as a natural occurrence. The monarch in particular, symbolized migration between the north and south of the Americas, paths also traveled by immigrant families. Other political activists like Faviana Rodriguez, Melanie Cervantes, and Ernesto Yerena would later adopt this symbol as a metaphor for the [right to migrate](#). During the march, the children carried the butterflies in a route that began at the Maricopa County Sheriffs Office Jail in South Phoenix, where Katherine's parents were detained. The march then proceeded to the Wells Fargo Tower in downtown Phoenix where Sheriff Arpaio's office is located. There, the children made their demands and requested immigration reform, and that the President stop his support of Sheriff Arpaio by ending policies like the 287(g) agreements which helped fund



*Children's Walk for Unity. 2009.*  
Puente Arizona, Phoenix.

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<sup>12</sup> DREAM Act was a policy first introduced in 2001 that would legalize youth brought to the United States as small children and who have served in the military or attended two years of college.

immigration raids in Maricopa County. The march succeeded in demonstrating the ways national immigration policies affect children and perpetuate family separation. President Obama and his administration did not respond to the demands that Katherine and the other children made during the march. Instead, the media spotlight was on Sheriff Arpaio when, in echoing “Buffalo Rick” (anti-immigrant radio personality), he proclaimed that “these parents are separating themselves from their children, when they could take them back to Mexico” and calling the march “child abuse,” because of the high temperatures of that day in Phoenix (AZTV, 2009). In response, Salvador Reza, a community organizer with Tonatierra—a community development organization—stated, “...child abuse is when children are waiting for their parents to come home, but they do not because the Sheriff has detained them. That is not only child abuse, but it is cruelty!” (AZTV, 2009). Despite the silence from the Obama administration, the general public was able to understand the issue from multiple perspectives. From immigrant advocates to conservative anti-immigrants, Arizona residents were reacting to Katherine’s story. Ultimately this type of dialogue is what the organizers hoped to initiate. Their goal was to raise consciousness about family separation in order to place more pressure on President Obama. For Katherine, the next few months included visits to the detention center where she could see her parents and sharing her story with the media.

Katherine states that this experience has changed her life in both positive and negative ways. Before the arrest, she wanted to attend Arizona State University to become a doctor, a teacher, a news anchor, or maybe a fashion designer. Now her dream is to become a lawyer, with a part time career in fashion. She would like to have the ability to “help people that are in need and to fight against evil-spirited laws,” (K. Figueroa, personal communication, 2011). Her parents were detained a total of three months, but even after their release, her family faced major uncertainty for more than four years. The next section will explain how her parents’ case was resolved and where the family is now.



Fernandez, Valeria. *Katherine Figueroa*. 2009. *Feet in Two Worlds*. Phoenix.

#### **After Detention**

After three months in detention, the Maricopa County Sheriff’s Office released Sandra and Carlos. From the time the grandmother called for help in 2009 until their final hearing in 2013, the family had to attend a court every few months to know if they could remain in the U.S. Each time the family had a court date they

had to pay a fine, which, coupled with the cost of probation, made life difficult for them. Often, the cost of legal fees, taking time off from work, and losing their financial provider(s) can be one of the most difficult things families experience. Moreover, the kind of legal assistance a family can obtain could determine the outcome of the situation. When a parent is detained, children and families often report not having enough food to eat, feeling uncertain about paying bills, and in some cases mothers reported going hungry to feed their children (R. Capps, 2007; Chaudry et al., 2010). In a study by the Urban Institute, respondents reported not having enough money to buy food and not eating balanced meals for more than six months after an immigration raid (Chaudry et al., 2010). Families struggle to find ways to make ends meet particularly when the main provider is detained and/or deported. This was no different in the case of the Figueroa family. The community organized carwashes, church events, and yard sales to cover the cost of food, housing, and legal fees. One of the largest expenditures was when the family had to pay \$13,500 to get Katherine's father, Carlos, out of detention. Their extended family sold food, organized volleyball tournaments, carwashes, and even sold their furniture to cover the costs of his release. When Maricopa County Sheriff's Office released Katherine's mother after paying bail, she was able to help the family with food sales to contribute to the fundraising efforts. However, upon release, Sandra and Carlos continued paying legal fees for future court hearings, which was difficult to do after losing their jobs. While the judge decided the case, the parents obtained work permits—despite facing difficulties finding work due to the charges of using false documents.

Despite the fact that Sandra and Carlos had two children with U.S. citizenship, their immigration case remained doubtful for years. They were accused of multiple criminal charges which included identity theft and being in the country without documentation. Sandra explains that although she was just working to help her family survive, in jail she was made to feel like a “criminal or an animal especially with how people treated you...calling you B\*\*\*\* and touching your body in ways that were uncomfortable” (S. Figueroa, personal communication, 2011). Even when Sandra and Carlos were “free” they had to pay \$131 per month in probation fees during an entire year, and they had to wear an ankle brace that tracked their location. Immigration policies in Arizona that seek to detain, criminalize, and deport are dehumanizing not only for the people in detention but

also for the family members. Katherine's mission in speaking to the media about her case was to humanize her parents and to bring attention to the ways that immigrant workers are vulnerable to harsh policies. This particular case is different from others concerning family separation in that not all families are able to harness enough support to pay bail or find adequate legal representation. Katherine's family was fortunate in that various attorneys took their case pro-bono and people from around the nation sent letters to the judge in support of the Figueroa family, testifying to their good character.

Currently, in 2015, the family lives in Phoenix and celebrated Katherine's quinceañera<sup>13</sup> last year. Their immigration case was [resolved](#) after years of delegation about the moral character and legal history of the Figueroa family in the country. With community support and multiple sources of legal representation, a judge decided that the family could remain in the U.S. Yet this process was not easy, the community had to mobilize numerous times to ask the judge not to uproot the Figueroa's from Arizona.



Katherine Figueroa Quinceañera, Phoenix, AZ. Personal photograph by author. 2014. Copyright 2015 by Silvia Rodriguez Vega.

### Conclusion

Overall, testifying in Congress, news stories, articles, plays, a [music video](#), and even a [documentary](#) on Katherine raised awareness about the experiences of the children of undocumented immigrants who have been separated from their families. Her actions inspired her entire family to help others that are going through similar situations. They now attend community events to speak about their story and urge people to get involved in organizing to change policies in Arizona. However, Katherine's story is only one narrative among the 5.5 million children of

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<sup>13</sup> A quinceañera marks a young girl's rite of passage into womanhood and is an important event families celebrate all over Latin America.

immigrant parents living in the U.S. Not all families have been fortunate enough to rally the same amount of support that her's was able to.

As previously stated, children of immigrants are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population. By 2040, one in three children will be growing in an immigrant household (Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011; Rong & Preissle, 1998). Despite the increase in numbers, anti-immigrant policies targeted towards undocumented families at the national and local level have lasting consequences for this population (Dreby, 2012b; Yoshikawa, 2011). In states like Arizona, immigrant communities have felt the heavy-handed immigration enforcement that the Obama administration has implemented since 2008 (Nava, 2014; Szkupinski-Quiroga et al., 2013). At the national level, after more than two million deported immigrants, children of those immigrants find themselves separated from their families, adopted by family members, or waiting for adoption in foster care (Chaudry et al., 2010; Nava, 2014). This work provides insight into the lives of children who live at the nexus of an immigrant addicted economy (Kandel & Massey, 2002) and draconian anti-immigration policy enforcement.

There is a need for more than just executive actions (DACA & DAPA). This country needs immediate and long lasting reform to immigration policy coupled with a family reunification program that prioritizes parents and children, particularly undocumented children and those in the foster care system that have been given-up for adoption. Rather than adding more children to an already overburdened system, it would be better for families to never get separated in the first place. Additionally, there is a need to better fund programs to aid in the physical and mental wellbeing of immigrant children and families, which include the child welfare system and non-profit organizations. Realistically, the aforementioned recommendations would be temporary solutions to treat the symptoms of a failing approach to foreign policy in countries south of the border. The North American Free Trade Agreement<sup>14</sup> (NAFTA) and other international polices that propel people out of their communities and into the U.S. for survival, must be understood as the catalyst for migration. As policy makers, educators, scholars, and advocates for human rights and dignity, we should strive to make this society better for its most vulnerable and youngest citizens, like Katherine.

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<sup>14</sup> An agreement signed in 1994 between Canada, the United States, and Mexico. This policy opened the borders for free commerce but not for labor.

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