

Civic-minded undocumented youth dream big

August 7 2012, By Suzanne Wu



More than 2,600 young people in California were surveyed for a report by USC Dornsife sociologist Veronica Terriquez. Photo by Laurie Moore.

(Phys.org) -- Seventy-two percent of undocumented youth involved in community organizations strongly believe they can make a difference, compared to 41 percent of youth overall.

For undocumented youth, involvement in civic organizations appears to enhance [aspirations](#) and actual educational attainment, according to a report released by the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration based in USC Dornsife.

As part of a larger study and ongoing research on low-income youth, Veronica Terriquez, assistant professor of sociology in USC Dornsife, surveyed more than 2,600 young people in California for this report. The results reveal an important correlation between involvement in community groups and future education and economic contributions.

“Civic engagement appears to help address some of the issues that low-income youth encounter,” said Terriquez, director of the Chicano and Latino Studies program in USC Dornsife. “The future of California — and indeed our country — depends on recognizing young people with high educational and career goals, who are actively engaged in their communities, and helping make these dreams accessible for them.”

Nearly 90 percent of undocumented youth surveyed for this report are low-income, and 74 percent lack health insurance. But Terriquez and co-author Caitlin Patler of UCLA found that undocumented youth who were involved in civic and community organizations had set high expectations for themselves — higher even than youth with legal status:

- Eighty-nine percent of undocumented youth involved in community organizations said they expected to have a high-skills job requiring a four-year college degree, compared to 60 percent of other youth.
- Seventy-two percent of undocumented youth involved in community organizations said they felt empowered to make a difference in their communities, compared to 41 percent of youth overall.

In addition to dreaming bigger, undocumented youth who were civically engaged also had significantly higher real [educational attainment](#) than other youth:

- Ninety-five percent of undocumented youth involved in community organizations had enrolled in some postsecondary education, compared

to 79 percent of other youth.

- Seventy-two percent of undocumented youth who were civically engaged received high grades in high school (mostly A's and B's), compared to 47 percent of other youth.

More than half of undocumented youth who are civically engaged were under the age of 5 when they arrived in the United States, Terriquez found. The majority of the undocumented youth in the survey are originally from Mexico.

“These undocumented students have a strong attachment to this country,” Terriquez said. “They feel like they are Americans, but on paper they are not.”

The research was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Spencer Foundation.

To access the data or a copy of the report in English, Spanish or Korean, visit the [CSII Web site](https://phys.org/news/2012-08-civic-minded-undocumented-youth-big.html).

Provided by USC College

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