



Community Leader: Getting to Know Rafael Vázquez

Rafael Vázquez is an EOPS (Extended Opportunity Program and Services) Outreach Specialist at the Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC). He is an advocate and role model for Latinx students, and an individual with a powerfully unique story.

Vázquez hosts a radio show called “Lideres del Futuro” (Leaders of the Future) on KBBF Bilingual radio. The program focuses on education, immigration, politics, mental health, and other issues that directly impact the local community. Additionally, Vázquez is the author of the book “Logrando tus Sueños (Achieving your Dreams).” The book was written as a guide for immigrant parents living in the United States. It highlights the panorama that many individuals face upon arriving in a new world different from their own, which can bring up hurdles and challenges, but shines a light on the many ways that help pave the way to success.

In recent years, there has been uncertainty about DACA – Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, particularly in 2017 when President Trump announced that the program would be coming to an end. Courts have since kept the program alive, shielding almost 670,000 unauthorized immigrants who came to the United States as children. In June 2019, the Supreme Court announced that it would hear the case for DACA, but that a decision would not be made until 2020. Currently, the DACA program continues, but it is only processing renewals and not accepting new applicants. Many DREAMers continue to express confusion and frustration. Vázquez’s work predominately revolves around working with youth to guide and mentor them to realize the importance of education in and outside of school. He continues to be an active volunteer, activist, and speaker for the local community, and in particular, the DREAMer community. Vázquez was a contributor and strong advocate in implementing Santa Rosa Junior College’s ‘Dream Center,’ which aims to provide support to undocumented students and a safe haven where students can feel at home.

Recently, Vázquez just published a journal for youth and adults in English called, “Fulfilling the Dream: A Daily Journey Towards Success.” These journals are guided towards healing. It is meant for English speaking youth and allies such as teachers, administrators, and politicians, in hopes they will begin to understand the challenges of the immigrant and underrepresented communities. Half of the proceeds go to Humanidad Therapy and Educational Services which provides therapeutic services to all members of the community, but with an emphasis on the Latinx community. Humanidad, where Vázquez is the board president, created a unique approach to therapy called “Convivencia.” The term derives from the idea that one can combine food with conversations, and it doesn’t feel like group therapy. Vázquez said, “This is what makes Humanidad different in how they understand the populations they serve in Sonoma County.”



Rafael Vázquez firmly believes that knowledge belongs to everyone and that it is best to offer resources and let individuals decide for themselves what to do with the information. He is an example of a resilient leader who is vastly respected and adored by the community. His work and guidance has left many positive impacts among various community members. When dealing with difficult situations, his simple suggestions to others is that “patience and understanding” are vital. After all, one has to understand the population they are working with to connect with them successfully.

Hernandez, Adali. (2012). “EOPS Hero helps Latino Students Find their Path.” *The Oak Leaf News*. Retrieved 15 September, 2020. (<https://theoakleafnews.com/features/2012/05/15/eops-hero-helps-latino-students-find-their-path/>).

Narea, Nicole. (2019). “The Battle over DACA comes to the Supreme Court: The Fate of some 670,000 Immigrants Hangs in Balance.” *Vox Media*. Retrieved 18 September, 2020 (<http://google.com/amp/s/www.vox.com/platform/amp/policy-and-politics/2019/11/11/20943523/daca-supreme-court-trump-dreamers-immigration>).