

Episode 228 – Dr. Deb Ortega and Dr. Ashley Hanna: Why DACA? Why Now? Pt 2

[00:00:08] Welcome to inSocialWork. The podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at www.inSocialWork.org. We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of inSocialWork is to engage practitioners and researchers in lifelong learning and promote research to practice and practice to research. We educate. We connect. We care. We're inSocialWork.

[00:00:37] Hi from Buffalo. In this season we are thankful that we get the opportunity to live in a world of ideas talk to interesting people learn from them and develop opinions and ideas of a room hear it in social work. We're thankful that people listen to our production. So we express our sincere gratitude to you. Happy thanksgiving everyone. From the whole inSocialWork Podcast team. I'm Peter Sobota in the second of a two part episode. Our guests Drs. Debra Ortega and Ashley Hanna discuss the narratives commonly associated with DACA recipients and immigrants and argue that these narratives need to be reconstructed. They share them more rarely discussed but accurate stories of these individuals including the trauma and re traumatization they face. Our guests conclude Part Two by hypothesizing what DACA recipients can expect in the future and what social workers might be called to do now. Deb Ortega Ph.D. is professor at the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work and Ashley Hanna Ph.D. is assistant professor at the University of Nevada Reno School of Social Work. Our guests were interviewed in September of 2017 by Mary Keovisai a Ph.D. student here at the UB school of social work.

[00:01:58] When the news started coming out that DACA was likely to be rescinded. It sounded like a lot of politicians from both sides seemed to oppose the decision. And there is also a narrative around DACA recipients as hardworking good immigrants. How do narratives around who is a good immigrant versus who is about immigrant influence coalition building across communities.

[00:02:20] This is Ashley and I can start I'd ask for Deb's chime in and we might share this response here. I think it's such an important question because throughout history we've continued to have this ongoing debate about who is deserving and who's undeserving and this includes social work as well.

[00:02:38] So when we're engaging in discussions about DACA recipient it's so very important that we do not create a hierarchy of who is better. For example a U.S. born citizen a naturalized citizen a permanent resident an unauthorized immigrants. It's these types of hierarchies that are so very common. Given the racist nativist system in the United States that really truly is designed to divide individuals based on various identities outis like citizenship immigrant status race ethnicity gender sexual orientation religion and so many other identity nationality immigration status and race are all socially constructed. They don't represent subjective differences. The truth is that naturalized U.S. citizens are no better or worse than unauthorized immigrants just as the U.S. born citizen is no better or worse than a naturalized U.S. so the thought that one or more deserving than another is a narrative perpetuated by white supremacy. This narrative creates division I think the way that this can play out or how we can see it being really dangerous is because we live in a system where structural oppression exists and some individuals are treated better based on their race or nationality. So for example our society provides white native born U.S. citizens with a lot of privileges that immigrant groups do not have that people of color do not have. And so within that structure it creates these divisions so someone that I was speaking with was talking about how because she came over she's now a naturalized U.S. citizen and she has an accent She's college educated it's super successful but she's noticed that she's been treated really poorly and oftentimes because she's of Mexican descent and has an accent is treated although she's an authorized or an undocumented immigrant and she would think this isn't fair. Right. And so in order to protect herself from those kinds of racists and nativist actions she kind of separates herself out as like Hey

I'm a U.S. citizen. And that can be really dangerous because what happens is the system takes that division and exploits it. So by creating someone to feel that they're better or better than another group based on that very subjective determination of who is a U.S. citizen or who's an authorized citizen versus someone else creates these divisions and separations that really just empowers the group as a whole. And so what I really come from within social work is I really like to highlight the importance of acknowledging the dignity and worth of every individual and that is one of our core values as social workers. Our country definitely would be a much better place if everyone regardless of immigration doubted gender ethnicity national origin sexual orientation and our other identities were treated with dignity and respect. But unfortunately this is not the way the U.S. is structured. So for me as a white U.S. born citizen I have to acknowledge that I live in a system that privileges me in most every way. And I recognize that this nation was born out of white supremacy was born out of the genocide of native peoples of chattel slavery and on the back of immigrants. This is a reality that we as members of the U.S. society really need to come to terms with so that we as a nation can become our best. The reality is we live in a very unjust society and I see this current discussion around DACA as an opportunity for all marginalized groups to come together to support one another and to put a stop to the divisions between us by those powers. So these divisions truly only serve the white elite or the few that hold all of the power and wealth in this nation. And the same divisions harms the majority and maintain the status quo which is a divided and racist and nativist nation. So really when I look at this issue and the way that we speak about DACA my only hope for the present and really for the future of our nation is for the majority of us living in the US that represent the diverse world in which we live. It's for us to come together to treat each other with dignity and respect. And to put a stop to the hate created by the white supremacist system that's so prevalent in our world. And as that saying goes. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. And I truly believe. So I urge allies and every marginalized group really to come together to support one another including but not limited to unauthorized immigrants recipients of Dokka. People of color who are in constant danger of being racially profiled or attacked because of the color of their skin. The LGBTQ community women and all other identities. Then on top of that we really have to acknowledge and support those intersecting identities who are regularly attacked in multiple ways and on multiple fronts simply for being who they are within a system that oppresses multiple aspects of their own identity.

[00:08:22] Could you elaborate on the ways that U.S. immigration policies can be traumatizing to a vulnerable population.

[00:08:30] This is the issue of immigration for any country is complicated and it's complicated by the way that that country actually engages in multiple kinds of policy. So in terms of the United States in this particular topic there's a lot of trauma that happens to the families especially as social workers we see an amount. Trauma is what I call stacked trauma. So when people immigrate here we used to talk a lot about how they were immigrating to get a better life to get their American dream to to have a better economy but they're actually not necessarily the context for which a lot of people have immigrated here especially from Latin American countries. So for instance we've had policies that have encourage violence in countries most of the guns that are in Mexico come from the United States. Mexico has some of the strongest gun laws in the world. Last time I checked I haven't done this recently but last time I checked I think there was only one place you could buy a gun in the country. So those guns come from actually our open gun policy in the United States. Then there's violence in communities. So people are escaping violence that has happened to them sometimes because they're a cultural minority group like the Mayans and are being targeted for violence because they're different people immigrate because of gangs and their families are threatened if their sons don't participate in gangs and there's violence. It's not like someone just walks up and says oh you know I'm going to hurt your mom if you don't come in the gang. There's a lot of violence that sets that up. Before that even become someone thought or reality right. And lots of. I mean we have issues around femicide in the world Latin American countries have had some of

the highest rates of homicide. So people go to great lengths especially when they're also immigrating from other countries. They have to actually cross to Mexico we have a policy in which we give Mexico money to protect their southern border. Better we do that. Actually other countries use the same method because they can actually give money to another country and not feel like they're responsible for human rights violations. So we give Mexico money to protect those borders. If human rights violations happen when they're incarcerating immigrants that's not our problem right. It's their problem. Kind of our mentality. And then what happens is actually there's a lot of preying on immigrants who are coming through Mexico to come to the United States. Actually it's very common for people to ride a train called La Bestia the beast you know like the way to come up to the from southern Mexico up to the north. And there's a lot of violence and gang violence. There's rape in fact and I don't think very many people talk about this but women who know that they're going to have to crossing Mexico and cross through the desert separating Mexico and the United States proactively have birth control injections that last for a long period of time because they know it is not just possible but probable that they'll get raped. And because many people have religious prohibitions around abortion they don't want to bear the child of their rapist. So they're traumatized when they come through Mexico. They get to the U.S. border and they're traumatized again because crossing the borders very dangerous. When you make that crossing so much more risky than people who are also very disreputable or involved in that there's violence there's sexual violence. Older people are left in the desert to die. We have lots of evidence of this. People die of thirst. Our own border patrol pours out water left for people so they don't die. So there why there are such little value that it's not even worth keeping them alive to deport them back. Right. So they pour out water. There's actually a film called The Trail of Hope and Terror. It's a documentary about justice experience. And so there's all this trauma experience as they're trying to cross the border. So they get to the United States and then they have the experience of being terrified that they're going to be deported back to some violent countries. They're terrified of what happens at immigration detention centers immigration detention centers our jails. I never thought I'd be a part of a country which jail babies small children in which when they come across the border they're caught on the border if they're deported they're put in actually really horrible conditions. I know that there's a narrative out there from some politicians who say you know oh it doesn't seem so bad. I would love to see them live their life in an immigration detention center with their families in which their children don't have real education in which they're told how to raise their children or whether they can give their children babies milk and there's no health care or poor health care or poor access. So there's all these ways that trauma happens. So they get to the United States. This is all happening. They're afraid about whether they're going to be deported. What begins to happen is this fear of deportation is rampant in the community. So everyone's hearing it and knows it's possible and knows people who've been deported their own parents their cousins and knows that it's not a just or fair process. And so this becomes really traumatizing. Ashley was a school social worker and we talked about during some of this time when this anti immigrant sentiment was being ramped up. There was increased enforcement and raids actually and in Colorado. We talked a lot because she was seeing 7 year olds who were terrified that they were going to come home from school and their parents were going to be deported. They didn't know if when they got home from school if their parents were going to come home. When Trump was elected this is something that was very common. Young people children 7 year old I can't imagine what it might be like at age 7 to be afraid that if my mom comes picks me up from school she might get picked up and deported. And we act as if these things don't have a consequence. And I just would like to think about what happens when people are traumatized traumatized and their families then are traumatized because that often goes untreated well because people can access mental health services often because they can't afford them. And that's not available to them or even health services.

[00:15:29] So they have untreated traumatization they grow up in a country which is supposed to be dream country. That then hurts them hurts their families doesn't protect them makes them at risk every day. And yet they don't really have viable options. And this sort of stacked trauma that is

untreated really affects people many different ways. And sometimes I think about the child soldiers in El Salvador. You know we were a very big part of that military junta. What happened in El Salvador during their civil war we supported the government. There a great movie. I know I love movies. There's a great movie called Innocent voices that shows what the story of young boys in El Salvador was when they were being recruited. So people immigrated after the Civil War. Young people emigrated or escaped to the United States because it was brutal and dangerous. A lot of them also went untreated. And what do you do when you feel completely powerless when you've seen brutality and violence when you're afraid all the time. It's not uncommon for people to try to figure out where their power is. I often wonder whether the consequences that we have around El Salvadorian gangs which are thought to be or spoken about as some of the most dangerous gangs if this is a result really of our own making because of how we supported that government because of their experiences because of the traumatization of their families and themselves. When you see so much violence there is a variety of ways it can affect you but it would not be uncommon for you to figure out how to have power in multiple ways. And some of this might result in some of the violence we see and it concerns me that as a nation we continue to think that we don't have to be responsible for the consequences of our own actions. For people who are experienced feeling somewhat safe from the moment because they always. Anyone who has DACA status knew it was for the moment feeling safe for the moment and having their own experience of family members being deported and their own experience of family members experiencing violence. We're creating a situation in which re-traumatization does have and will have a lasting impact on people and people who otherwise given other opportunities might make choices that are about contributing can find themselves having difficulty regulating emotions. Social workers who are interested can look up and see you know what is the impact of post-traumatic stress syndrome. These things are really about people struggling to regulate themselves because of how much trauma they experience. It seems like it's just a policy but DACA is one policy. If so many have created a situation in which people of color who support an economy support us economy are maligned dehumanised are susceptible to violence. They're susceptible to unscrupulous lawyers who say they can get them citizenship status and they pay them lots and lots of money and it doesn't happen or people who are day laborers and then on the corner getting jobs in which this is a very common experience in which they would work a week and maybe not get paid for that whole week or they get paid for half the money that there is this amazing consequence of not just re-traumatization but stress about just living a life. And you know people want to say well if it's so hard why don't they just go back to their countries. And I think that the rest of that is why don't they go back to their countries where they can be raped murdered. Well they know that they're not for their children are at risk where actually yes they may be living in poverty but not unrelated to some of the U.S. policies but NAFTA. So this re-traumatization is really a big topic in a big picture. But I think that gives you a sense of people who are interested in being really fucked up this process could maybe investigate ways in which they could think about what are these impacts.

[00:20:19] One thing I'd like to add that you brought up my experience in school social work and so one of the things that I would see in schools as well. When I was working in them and now since and I've remained in contact with friends and colleagues in schools is to think about secondary trauma. So within schools and students are coming so when the new administration changed and really had a lot of fear what would happen based on some of the campaign promises Trump was making regarding immigration. And so now we've seen these changes in DACA. So a lot of my colleagues of color were saying students are coming to me because they trust me they have more trust with me than with their teachers who tend to be white middle class teachers. And so for those teachers of color then there's the trauma of hearing these stories of seeing these students and hearing the stories but also not having the training to deal with what they're hearing. And also the increased burden that teachers of color and staff of color and Keith through 12 education say because the students generally will be more likely to go to them for support because there is more trust there. And so I think that's another huge thing. About. And so lots the K through 12 education system is

very oppressive within itself. And so for staff and teachers of color who have gone through that system they've endured their own traumas from that from learning of histories from the viewpoint of the oppressor from not being given the appropriate support structurally as well and then coming and seeing what's happened to their students. And then as additional policies are being implemented and they're watching kids come in and cry and be fearful and not be successful and then not having the skills and outlet for that. So I think that's just another way. Just one other way. There's so many ways that we see how traumatizing these changes to immigration policy have been. Not just for those immigrant families but for professionals who are serving them as well. N.

[00:22:42] Ow after the announcement of the end of the program what should those with DACA do at this point.

[00:22:49] This is Ashley I can speak to it a little bit. I'm not a lawyer. Just putting that out there which means that I can't and actively answer this question. That's why there's been lots of information put out by immigration lawyers to give direction to people who are currently recipients of DACA. And for those who have already submitted their initial application or are waiting for that application or another one to be processed. And so most important is I highly recommend that individuals contact a trusted immigration lawyer. And if a person can't afford that to contact a trusted nonprofit dedicated to protecting the rights of immigrants or historically disenfranchised communities and there's been a lot of news or suggestions from lawyers as well to stay away from Nazario's because you don't know how the background of these individuals and a step brought up you have to be very careful because not all people who are participating and presenting themselves as lawyers or with expertise are people who know what they're doing and have the best interest of their clients at heart. So that's just something to be aware of the thing that we also know that DACA is a liminal status and that anything can happen. There are currently lots of changes being made with DACA but the reality is nobody truly knows what this administration is going to do next. So I'll just share a few things to consider that I've seen on the USCIS website lawyers websites and also in conversation with colleagues so to understand that first for those who are in fact currently protected through DACA according to most reports that they will continue to be protected until their darkest status expires so it's not right now what the experts are saying it's not that immediately people are going to be deported. But I think also to gain an awareness around what will happen when their status expires. And again we don't know what this government is going to do. So it's important to be aware also on the USCIS website it states that individuals should not apply for advanced parole. That's no longer being considered. Going along with that individuals with DACA that should not leave the country as it's unclear if we'll be able to return if they leave the country. Finally I think this is a really important piece of advice for unauthorized immigrants. Immigrants protected through DACA. And basically anyone who does not have U.S. citizenship or might be a targeted group. And that's to do their best really to remain control of their environment and stay out of activities or situations that might put them in contact with local law enforcement or ICE. So for instance not putting yourself in a situation that you're surrounded by illegal activities or individuals who might break the law. So obviously as a professor I work on a college campus. And so underage drinking might be very common. And so advice to students with DACA is not to put themselves in situations where they're surrounded by friends who might be drinking and similarly to be really careful of who they drive with. So don't get in the car with someone who is irresponsible someone who has had injuring someone who's not a good driver and maybe is not following traffic laws like speeding rolling stop signs things of this nature. And of course for individuals who are protected through DACA not to have even one drink and drive a car and to follow all traffic laws whenever possible and not because breaking any law right now could potentially put individuals of Jeopardy in coming into contact with law enforcement and as protection are starting to expire. I think just depending on local and state governments and the direction our federal government take really any interaction with law enforcement in that sense could be dangerous. And that said there have been local law enforcement agencies that have come out and said look we want any individual no matter

your documentation status to come to us to report crimes to make sure that they feel safe with. And that's really important and that's one of the dangers of what Trump is doing by creating this fear is because that's not good for the community's safety to create fear when individuals don't feel comfortable reaching out to police when a crime has been committed against them is a pretty scary thing and so kind of even though I say be aware of that you don't put yourself in a situation that you'll be accused of a crime. It's still knowing your local law enforcement agency. So if a crime is committed you are able to keep yourself safe and make sure that that can get reported and that can be a very scary thing for individuals. I think probably the most important piece of advice would for everyone to remember that everyone has constitutional right. So for example if an immigration agents knocking on the door do not open that door and if you have a screened or keep that shot and make sure that's the law. If that agent is out the door to ask for a signed warrant from a judge to be slipped under the door and if the warrant is in fact signed by a judge only the person who is listed on that warrant should step outside the house and ice shouldn't be invited into the house because otherwise unauthorized immigrants in the home could be in jeopardy if there is no sign warrants. The advice generally has been that I've heard from lawyers and again I'm not a lawyer don't open the door don't engage in conversation. And for everyone to remember that they have the right to remain silent. So they don't have to answer any question if an immigration agent is trying to talk to them. If a police officer asks your immigration status you do not have to answer and you should not answer. Basically don't say anything without speaking to a lawyer because everyone has that right to speak to a lawyer. If you're outside your home at the time that you come in contact with law enforcement it's OK to ask each. Or the law enforcement official if you're free to leave and if they say yes it's got ability to leave calmly and so that happened where I think I heard of an individual that they were witness to a car crash and kind of were in that vicinity and then to be able to leave and to because they weren't directly involved in that. And so these are just a few tips that I've heard from different sources. There's a ton of information online. So I really encourage people to go look online contact immigration lawyers that are trusted within the community and kind is just collect that information to be able to share it. That is or anything that I've said that you feel like is off or something that I've forgotten.

[00:30:04] Well the only thing actually I haven't thought about it until exactly this moment is it would be helpful if people actually understood the sanctuary movement and sanctuary churches. We have sanctuary churches in Denver. I'm not exactly sure about the process for the church it's probably very individual about how and when they choose to give sanctuary. But it would be important to know that information.

[00:30:29] What does all this mean for us as social workers social work.

[00:30:34] We're a field that recognizes as I said earlier that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. And it's our responsibility as social workers and we're really called to address any and all injustices when and where we see them. So we are called to stand up to racism sexism heterosexism nativism classism environmental injustices and all types of repression. This attack on Dhaka is an injustice and I am a social worker so this is about my values and the values of our profession. The debate around Dhaka truly is an opportunity for not only the field of social work but for our entire nation to confront our racist and nativist history as well as the contemporary racist nativism that we see. If we don't acknowledge the white supremacy our nation was built on it will continue to pervade every aspect of our lives. For myself as a white US citizens brought up and educated in the US system it's really easy to deny this history of white supremacy. It's so easy for me to deny the benefits that I receive from that history. However the choice to deny our true history and its implications means that we are actively consenting to racism nativism and a white supremacist nation that oppresses all people of color. So as a social worker this truly does not fit my values. The reality is it's the dominant white group that continues to vote for white government officials who are putting these policies and practices in place and throughout history and even today

these public officials are responsible for maintaining the structures that oppressed historically disenfranchised communities. Because of this history and my identity as a white middle class U.S. citizen and social worker it's my responsibility to be a leader and to actively engage and address the white supremacist and racist nativist policies and practices of our nation. Like the decision to end DACA I can no longer leave it to communities of color and other historically disenfranchised communities to address these issues on their own. They've been doing this work for too long so really truly I see this as time for the white dominant community to take responsibility for our history and for creating and maintaining the white supremacist system in the US. And as social workers what can we do to ensure that we look at issues around immigration through a human rights lens.

[00:33:20] It's funny about when we talk about who we are as social workers. Ashley and I see social workers come in all sorts of perspective and for us it sort of breaks down into thinking about it in two ways. There are people who believe that social work is just their profession. And then there are other people who believe that social work is who they are. So if you're a social worker who believes this is your profession you're clocking in and out basically for your eight hours. Then it's important to think about what is the impact to your individual client. So for instance if you're working with families where immigration status is an issue then making sure that they have a plan says one of the parents get deported. That someone actually has power of attorney. I think it's really important to understand that yes everyday people are afraid of deportation. So if you hear children saying you know I'm scared it's very inappropriate to dismiss this that indeed they do feel scared. So you have to feel better for us to say oh don't worry just think happy thoughts or let's do relaxation. The threat is real. And so figuring out how do you talk to people of all ages when they come to you with concerns and being able to be present to their fears that are real fears they might not be your fears but they're definitely their fears. I think you have to understand that if someone is an immigrant in this country and they don't have access to citizenship this is not something that falls under mandating reporting. We are not legally bound nor I think morally bound to report that someone is deportable. Those kinds of issues are really important to think about who your client is sitting in front of you you should be as educated as possible about the context in which people come to you. So if you're providing therapeutic services and people are struggling to pay for it or you know they're talking about how hard it is to live in this country to suggest that they might go back to their country of origin because it seems like it would be easier it's just possible it might be easier to you. But not for them because you might not really understand the violent context in which they live. If you're using translators there it's important to know if your client actually speak Spanish. There are a number of people come from Indigenous communities in which they may be have enough Spanish to maybe get ice or no Spanish at all. And so the things that you're asking them to participate in and understand they might not understand in Spanish and they might need a translator who's more appropriate to their first language. Those are the things that I think are just professional social work. Ashley might have a perspective around it. Does it mean to be.

[00:36:24] Actually embody social work values that Deb and I talked about that we both agree that we're both social workers through and through. And I think having that perspective is a great way to see any issues through a human race. So social work is our value system and for those who identify this way using our code of ethics is a good way to ensure that we see all these issues through a human rights lens. So I want to paraphrase the NASW preamble because I think it's so important according to our NASW code of ethics it's social workers it is our primary mission to enhance human wellbeing and meet the basic human needs of all people with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are historically disenfranchised oppressed and living in poverty. Fundamental to social work is its attention to the environmental forces that create contribute to and address societal ills and truly a historic and defining feature of social work is the person and environment perspective which is a guiding principle that calls social workers to focus on both individual well-being within our societal context and the well-being of our society social

workers should be sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strives to end discrimination oppression poverty and other forms of social injustice. This is the responsibility of all social workers whether they serve the community directly or indirectly. At a micro mezo or macro level and so our mission as a profession is rooted in a set of core values and these core values are the foundation of social work and that truly is what sets us apart from other helping professions. So our value system includes service social justice dignity and worth of the person. The importance of human relationships integrity and confidence so using that as a guide is a good way to not only see an issue but also practice through more culturally responsive one. And I can end with a few steps that can guide social workers or any other people interested in doing anti oppressive work. So step 1 entails a lot of honest self reflection. I always have my students read an article by Barbara Harris and she says we must reject our claims of innocence. And so what this means is we must acknowledge and take responsibility for the role that we play in the inequities that exist in our society. So to do this I have a few questions that I think are really helpful to get us thinking first is how does internalized white supremacy impact the way we view ourselves and the way we view others. How does it impact our view of policies and practices. How do we individually benefit from the system and how do we participate in maintaining a system that benefits white particularly white elites. And after we reflect on that think the next step is to ask ourselves how do we break our habit. That reinforce the status quo. How do we change our behaviors so that we no longer participate in the maintenance of white supremacy. And third how do we ultimately dismantle the white supremacist system and instead implement an equitable system for all. And so finally after that reflection and critical thought it's time to take action and to live that change every day.

[00:40:23] And for me I think that again it brings me back to we must first admit the reality of our world. And when I look at this the issue of immigration through this human rights lens it's important to recognize that we live in a truly dangerous time and we have not made the kind of progress in civil rights that most of us would hope for or believe that we have. Our reality is that we live in a time where many overt forms of oppression and discrimination have surfaced in much Sidler but equally harmful ways. At the same time we live in a time where many of the older more overt forms of oppression and discrimination are now resurfacing we live in a time where women and people of color are not equally represented in our local state and national governments. We live in a time where women continue to make far less than men in the workforce. And this list can go on and on. The reality is that we live in a time of injustice. And for us to truly take the human rights one and make the change we have to acknowledge that although the White supremacist system did not begin with us. But it is our job to work throughout our lives so that this injustice.

[00:41:47] Well thank you Deb and Ashley both so much for engaging in this conversation today and very insightful.

[00:41:56] Thank you Mary.

[00:41:58] You've been listening to Deb Ortega and Ashley Hanna discuss the DACA program on inSocialWork.

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