

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 2010

**“PAPERS: STORIES OF UNDOCUMENTED YOUTH”
DOCUMENTARY FILM AVAILABLE ON DVD SEPTEMBER 14TH
FOLLOWING NATIONAL SCREENING TOUR**

After over 500 screenings in nearly 50 states “Papers” is released on DVD just in time for back-to-school and renewed debate on the DREAM Act

New York, NY—Imagine that you were a model student and active member of your community but upon graduating high school couldn't work, drive, apply for a state ID, or get on an airplane. Imagine that you couldn't accept the college scholarships that you had been awarded and that you had to pay foreign student tuition in the state where you grew up. Imagine you lived in constant fear of being deported from the only home you've ever known to a country you don't remember, where you know no one, and don't even speak the language.

For 65,000 undocumented students beginning their senior year of high school this month, this is not a fictitious Orwellian nightmare but reality. Pending legislation called the DREAM Act is their only hope. The DREAM Act, first introduced in 2001 and re-introduced in March 2009, would provide a path to citizenship for undocumented youth who attend college or join the military.

The challenges these students face and their organized efforts to pass the DREAM Act are unknown to most Americans but are brought to light in **“Papers: Stories of Undocumented Youth”**, a feature-length documentary chronicling one of the most critical civil rights struggles of our time.

The film, having premiered in nearly 50 states at more than 500 venues this year, will be for sale on DVD beginning September 14th, just in time for back-to-school and for renewed debate on the DREAM Act that could change these students' lives forever. DVD sales are available at <http://www.papersthemovie.com>

Directed by Anne Galisky and produced by Rebecca Shine of Portland, Oregon's Graham Street Productions, the film follows the personal stories of five undocumented students and the national grassroots movement working to pass the DREAM Act.

It also includes expert commentary from political, academic and civil rights leaders across the nation including **Senator Robert Menendez, Karen Narasaki of the Asian American Justice Center, Clarissa Martinez De Castro of NCLR, Joe Solmonese of the Human Rights Campaign, and Kent Wong of**

the UCLA Labor Center. They situate the fight for the DREAM Act within the history of many of America's most important civil rights struggles.

The students featured in the film, most of whom "came out" publicly as undocumented for the first time in **Papers**, are heirs to the proud American tradition of sacrificing one's own safety and security for a greater cause. They make the film much more than a film about a single political struggle or policy, but also a classic story of triumph over adversity in pursuit of the American dream.

The film was produced in conjunction with El Grupo Juvenil, the "Papers" youth crew, who participated in all aspects of the production and distribution of the film.

More information about the film is available at www.papersthemovie.com

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS:

Anne Galisky is the Director of "Papers: Stories of Undocumented Youth" and a co-founder of Graham Street Productions in Portland, Oregon. She holds a Masters degree in History and her research on the Japanese Internment during WWII is included in the Internment Memorial at the Expo Center in Portland, Oregon. Anne also founded and has operated Small World Builders, a building construction company, for the past fifteen years.

Rebecca Shine is the Producer of "Papers" and a co-founder of Graham Street Productions. Her passion for literature and the art of storytelling drew her to documentary film production. Before producing "Papers," Rebecca provided consulting services to non-profits, schools and public agencies in the areas of economic development, social services and youth leadership. She has mentored many young people, including a number of undocumented youth. Her passion for social and economic justice, matched by her love of storytelling, inspired her to bring the stories of immigrant youth to light.

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SAMPLE INTERVIEW

“Papers” Director, Anne Galisky, and Producer, Rebecca Shine

Q: What first drew you to this story?

A: About six years ago, we both began tutoring and mentoring immigrant youth who were at risk of dropping out of high school in Portland, Oregon. Even though we knew a lot about challenges facing at-risk youth, we were dismayed by the extra obstacles that stood in the way of some of these young people because of their lack of “papers.” That in turn made us painfully aware of the bigger picture: how much our nation is losing by keeping laws in place that bar millions of children from pursuing their dreams and realizing their potential.

Most of all, we grew to love each of these young people and began wondering how we could help them fight the injustice of their circumstances. We came to believe that making a film would be a great way to help other people meet these extraordinary youth, understand their stories, and hopefully begin to relate to them in a new way. As the idea grew, our group of willing participants grew and evolved into a crew that came to be called El Grupo Juvenil, young people from across the US who wanted to help undocumented youth tell their own stories to a national audience.

Then, in the fall of 2007, two things happened. First, the DREAM Act failed to overcome a filibuster in the Senate. Second, Oregon’s Governor, Ted Kulongoski issued an Executive Order changing state law to require that all applicants for state IDs or drivers licenses have Social Security numbers. Both of these events took a terrible toll on the immigrant youth we worked with, and gave us the impetus to start the production of “Papers.”

Q: Why don’t you show the other side of the debate?

A: We spend the first three minutes of the film, without dialogue, showing images from both pro-immigrant and anti-immigrant marches and rallies to remind audiences of the extremely polarized and vitriolic debate that surrounds these young people every day. We also interviewed over 150 people from across the country who were both in favor of and against immigration reform, and conducted many interviews at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions in the summer of 2008.

However, as we continued to film, we realized how rare it is to hear directly from undocumented students and how common it is to hear anti-immigrant and anti-immigration-reform voices, so we decided to emphasize the students’ stories first and foremost. There’s no arguing with someone’s personal experience and this is the story that is so often overlooked – how do undocumented immigrant youth feel and what do they think about their situation? Politicians, teachers, and community leaders provide the historical, cultural, and political context to the youths’ stories.

Q: How did you find the students? Isn't it dangerous for them to appear in the film?

A: We interviewed dozens of undocumented youth across the country. Some we already knew from our work as mentors and advocates, and others were introduced to us as we traveled. Still others heard about the project and contacted us to share their stories. Over the course of a year we identified the five main characters, each of whom was willing to sacrifice anonymity to appear on film, had come from different countries under widely varying circumstances, and who had unique personalities, dreams and struggles.

Each of the main characters: Monica, Yo Sub, Juan Carlos, Simone, and Jorge, had the awareness that telling their stories would encourage other people to become more public about who they are. And we have seen that this is in fact true: at many screenings of the film across the country, young people are “stepping out of the shadows” and, sometimes for the first time, declaring their immigration status openly.

And yes, it does pose risks to publicly declare your undocumented status, so we were very careful to respect each of the students' choices about their level of exposure. Simone, for example, made the choice to only show her eyes in order to protect her safety and privacy. Her choice demonstrates the fear that millions of kids currently live with every day, and emphasizes the huge risk a handful of them are taking by telling their stories.

Despite a recent NY Times article about the Obama administration not prioritizing the deportation of undocumented students, no one knows when the political winds could shift and each of the students is still legally at risk of arrest, detention and deportation at any time.

Q: What is happening in the lives of your main characters today?

A: Jorge recently completed a 14-day hunger strike in front of Sen. Diane Feinstein's Los Angeles office, the latest step in his overall choice to be more public about his immigration status. His personal hope is to convince a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate to support the DREAM Act and then he will move on to pursue a graduate degree in African American literature.

Monica lives with her husband and works in elder care. Her family remains split between the U.S and Guatemala while her father's 19-year-long asylum case is still pending.

Juan Carlos struggles with his limited choices now that he has graduated from high school. He feels that his dreams are on hold until the DREAM Act passes so he advocates for its passage while continuing to try to be a role model for young people in his community.

Simone finished her Associates Degree and wants desperately to contribute to the country she calls home. She worries about her little brother and tries to keep up his hopes so that he will think that it is worthwhile to stay in school.

Yo Sub is getting ready to start his second year of college and is majoring in Economics. He loves college life and is thriving academically as could be expected of someone who graduated high school with a 4.5 GPA. What happens after graduation will depend on whether the DREAM Act or comprehensive immigration reform passes by then.

Q: What has changed in the DREAM Act movement since the film's release?

A: The good news is that momentum is building behind the DREAM Act and it is becoming better known and more widely supported. DREAMers have begun to deliberately draw inspiration from the civil rights movement and the gay rights movement, both in terms of messaging and tactics, which has added a historical dimension to their work that not only adds a great deal strategically, but inspires them and others to see themselves in that proud, and ultimately triumphant, historical context.

They are taking some enormous risks like conducting hunger strikes in New York and Los Angeles, walking from Miami to Washington, DC, taking part in civil disobedience actions including staging sit-ins at Congressional offices, and marching on Capitol Hill. Mostly, they are going public and telling their stories and the American people are starting to listen. President Obama is in support of the DREAM Act and Senate Majority leader Harry Reid has expressed a willingness to bring the DREAM Act forward this fall. Even in an era of rare bipartisan cooperation, both Democrats and Republicans are co-sponsors and proponents of this legislation.

Someday soon we hope to look back on this as an extraordinary time in the history of the immigrant rights movement. We are thrilled to have been able to both chronicle the movement and to support its expansion and public support through "Papers."

Q: You make strong connections between the LGBTQ rights movement and the immigration rights movement in the film. Can you explain how they are linked?

A: One of the main characters in "Papers," Jorge, is both undocumented and queer. He likens his experience to living at two borders at the same time. In fact, as we were working on the film, we found that a large proportion of the young people who are leading the movement and going public about their status as undocumented (they call it "coming out") also identify as queer or LGBTQ.

They realize that there is extraordinary power in their stories and in telling the truth. The boldness of it inspires us. By coming out as undocumented, they risk arrest, detention, and deportation. By coming out as queer, they risk being ostracized from their families, their churches, their cultures of origin and their communities. But in talking with these courageous young people, it is obvious that they are not going to stop being public about who they are. In some ways the most vulnerable, they are also the most brave. They, more than anyone, know the power of "coming out" and recognize that going public is the way to change peoples' hearts and minds.

Q: El Grupo Juvenil is mentioned in the film’s credits and on your site. Who are they and what role did they play in “Papers”?

A: El Grupo Juvenil is the “Papers” youth crew. This group of young people was integral to every aspect of the film’s production and distribution and includes over 750 participants nationwide. These youth come from a wide variety of neighborhoods, races, ethnicities, religions, and abilities, and vary in immigration status and sexual orientation. We wanted to make a film about undocumented youth but also wanted to include as many of them, and other youth who care about them, in every step of creating the film, and El Grupo Juvenil was our answer.

The group began with the youth we were mentoring and tutoring and soon grew like wildfire into a national network that will have lasting value far beyond helping with the film. Participants developed their leadership capacities, learned public policy advocacy, presented at local, regional and national conferences, and designed and led workshops for middle school and high school students. Some of the group’s leaders have now appeared on CNN and Univision, on radio and in newspapers. They were honored in May at a Congressional reception at the U.S. Capitol.

Q: Once the DREAM Act becomes law, why should people buy and watch “Papers”?

A: “Papers” is timeless and universal because it is ultimately about overcoming obstacles, especially those that seem insurmountable. No matter who you are, struggle is a major element of the human experience and something we all relate to. Who knows, it might even be more inspiring after DREAM becomes law— everyone loves to see others succeed despite impossible odds because it gives us faith we can do the same. This film directly chronicles five incredible young people facing that challenge, but represents 2 million more such stories.

Q: What’s next for Graham Street Productions?

A: Well, we are still very busy with “Papers” this year. The film is coming out on DVD on September 14th, just in time for back-to-school—a period that is extremely hopeful and fun for most families, but that means the beginning of a crisis for the 65,000 undocumented high school seniors who will graduate this year—and we are hoping that will kick off another amazing round of screenings and discussions around the nation.

Anne has continued to film the DREAM Act movement and exploring what to do with that additional footage while also looking forward to starting another yet-to-be-announced film project. Rebecca is working closely with El Grupo Juvenil to expand their youth organizing work in 2011.

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BACKGROUND: ABOUT THE DREAM ACT

The Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act or DREAM Act is a bill that would provide undocumented youth the opportunity to earn citizenship over the course of 11 years, if the applicant meets certain requirements. DREAM Act applicants:

1. Must have entered the United States before the age of 16
2. Must have been present in the United States for at least five consecutive years prior to enactment of the bill
3. Must have graduated from a United States high school, or have obtained a GED, or have been accepted into an institution of higher education
4. Must complete at least two years of college or two years of U.S. military service
5. Must be between the ages of 12-35 when the bill is enacted
6. Must have good moral character

An estimated 2 million undocumented children currently live in the U.S. and 65,000 undocumented youth graduate every year from high school without “papers.” Most undocumented youth have no path to legal residency or citizenship at this time. There is no application they can fill out and no line to wait in. They are simply stuck in an impossible legal situation without remedy. For most, passage of the DREAM Act is their only hope.

Members of Congress have introduced several forms of this bill in both the House of Representatives and the Senate since 2001. The DREAM Act bill, brought forward in the Senate after a Comprehensive Immigration Reform bill failed in the summer of 2007, required 60 votes to gain cloture. It failed on a 52-44 vote in favor of the bill, only 8 votes short of overcoming a filibuster by opposing Senators.

Democratic and Republican co-sponsors re-introduced the DREAM Act in the House and Senate in March of 2009. The bill has not yet been scheduled for a vote but could be any day if Congressional leadership decides the time is right. Pressure has been building for the vote to occur before the 111th Congress ends this winter by DREAM activist students and their allies

It is important to note that opponents of the DREAM Act argue erroneously that the bill requires states to give in-state tuition to the Act’s beneficiaries. States would not be required to do so under provisions of the Act. Others have mistakenly labeled the DREAM Act as an “amnesty” program that would encourage further illegal immigration. However, only children brought here at least five years before the DREAM Act is passed would qualify. Some think that the DREAM Act, though worthy legislation, should only be enacted as part of a comprehensive immigration reform.

The next few months will be crucial in the ongoing public debate over the DREAM Act and its legislative fate. “Papers: Stories of Undocumented Youth” brings a human face to this debate and provides a historical perspective often missing in the polarized debates about immigration.

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