

Diana Contreras, recipient of the 2018 Beat the Odds® scholarship, wrote the following speech to read out loud at the Beat the Odds® celebration in March of this year. Due to COVID-19, we were unable to hear her words in person, but a copy of her powerful speech is provided below. We are pleased to share that Diana will be returning to George Washington University to continue pursuing her human services and social justice major as a sophomore this fall.

“On March 14, 2016, while crying on a plane because I was leaving my country, I never thought I was going to be standing before you getting such an incredible award. I never thought I was going to be able to communicate in a language other than Spanish. I never thought I was going to be the first one in my family attending college, with a full ride to George Washington University.

But I wouldn't be here if it wasn't because of God, my family, my friends, my teachers, counselors, social workers and without all of you who made this possible. Thank you Mrs. Edelman and all the sponsors for changing the life of so many youth who, like me, didn't have any hope until we found out that because of people like you, we can pursue our dreams.

Thank you CDF staff for becoming an important part of our lives, for being patient and working closely with us, for making sure we have the skills to succeed and lead us on our way to college and to help lift our families out of poverty.

I never believed I would be here, yet, I'm here, and I'm eager to keep fighting for immigrants like me. I'm eager to continue showing that minorities can succeed as well. I'm eager to become a social worker and continue spreading the love and support I have received.

Unfortunately, young people like us have to make double the effort in order to achieve what we deserve in life, but that is not going to stop us. We might cry, we might want to stop sometimes, but we will not do so.

It's been a long journey to make it where I am today, but I'm glad I went through all these barriers because now I can say to all the children and to all the immigrants out there...That I was there, that I know how it feels to be the first one, that I know how it feels to be the only one, that I know how much courage it takes to break generational

chains. But these are the moments and these are the places that are going to make you stronger, where you are going to show what you are made of: courage, resilience and determination.

I'm here to tell you that you can make it anywhere you want, regardless of the odds you went through, so don't let anything and anyone stop you, because it's our duty to demonstrate how powerful, resilient and unstoppable we are.

There's still hope, there are still organizations like the Children's Defense Fund that care about us, about our future, about our success and recognize all the effort you have put in to keep fighting.

And always remember...“if you can't fly, then run
if you can't run, then walk
if you can't walk, then crawl,
but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward”.

Thank you.”

Diana Contreras

2020 Beat the Odds Honoree