The Human Rights Watch Student Task Force (STF) launched the fall 2017 campaign with the help of spoken word artist Alex Alpharaoh (above, prepping students for a presentation), to fight for the human rights of undocumented youth in their communities. Since 2012, nearly 800,000 undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children were allowed to go to school and work without fear of deportation under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. On September 5, 2017, President Trump rescinded the program and gave Congress six months to determine the fate of DACA recipients. As of June 22, 2018 (our print date) their fate still hangs in frightening limbo.

**Campaign Highlights:**

- Students made calls to the White House, Speaker of the House Paul Ryan and Congressman Steve Knight to advocate for a clean DREAM Act.
- Chapters collected petition signatures urging Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and Santa Clarita Valley Congressman Steve Knight to pass a clean DREAM Act.
- Eight STF chapters hosted performances by Alex Alpharaoh, a DACA recipient and spoken word artist (above), to share his story of being undocumented in the U.S.
- STF chapters organized unity circles, youth orchestras, tabling events, all-school presentations and Human Rights Days to show solidarity with DACA recipients.
- Chapter members wore their “Immigrants Are U.S.” t-shirts to remind their communities that the U.S. is a nation of immigrants.
On Wednesday, February 14, 2018, a mass shooting occurred at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Seventeen people were killed and 14 more were taken to hospitals, making it one of the world’s deadliest school massacres. Since that shooting, student survivors have emerged as America’s most powerful advocates for reforming gun-control laws. They spoke at rallies, confronted state legislators in Florida’s capital, and spurred students at high schools across the country to walk out in a show of solidarity.

Inspired by the Parkland students, STFers planned and/or participated in the national walkouts on March 14 and April 20 to advocate for safe schools. During those events, STF pre-registered nearly a thousand future high school student voters. STFers also held moments of silence, remembering the 17 victims from Stoneman Douglas HS and hundreds of other gun victims, spoke up for their human rights to safety and education, demanded protection from gun violence and signed letters and petitions to legislators.

**Campaign Highlights:**

- STF worked across campuses and with students from other high schools to organize area-wide walkouts, including some to City Halls. Students repeated rally cries inspired by Stoneman Douglas student Emma Gonzalez saying, “We all have the right to live free from fear and violence in our community. No student, teacher, or administrative staff should ever go to school afraid. They say that tougher gun laws do not reduce gun violence. We call BS!”
- Members organized die-ins during 17 minutes of silence.
- Several STF chapters displayed empty desks and the bios and photos of the 17 victims from Stoneman Douglas HS.
- STF leaders in Santa Clarita Valley collected thank you notes to Dick’s Sporting Goods and Walmart for reforming their gun sale policies and wrote condolence letters to the Stoneman Douglas victims’ families.
- One chapter of STFers made a paper chain to honor the victims of the 26 deadliest school shootings in the U.S. Each colored link had the name and age of the person killed or injured. They hung the chain from the rafters of their four-story main stairwell.
STF students and teachers participate in three leadership workshops every year.

During the Fall Leadership Workshop, participants were moved to protect the human rights of DACA recipients by Alex Alpharaoh, a DACA recipient and spoken word artist. Alex helped the audience understand the human cost of losing the DACA program by sharing his story of living undocumented in the U.S., the country he has lived in since he was three-months-old, and the only home he knows.

In February, with the March 5 DACA deadline looming, STFers determined their next steps for emergency actions to protect DACA recipients and also prepared for April Genocide Awareness and Prevention Month. HRW LA Committee member Susi Bahat shared her Jewish family’s history of surviving the Holocaust and then living among their German perpetrators.

At the Year-End Leadership Workshop, surrounded by their campaign posters and photos, members acknowledged their ongoing work to protect DACA recipients, secure school safety, and raise awareness of probable genocide against the Rohingya in Burma.
STF Alumni: Where Are They Now?

Shay Ellaboudy
Canyon ‘17
UC Santa Barbara ‘21

STF embedded a feeling of empowerment to create the change I want to see in the world. We weren’t just talking about human rights violations, but actively planning events and educating people to try and make a difference. STF gave me a great opportunity to connect with people whose personal stories and strength were inspiring. I am now at UCSB’s College of Creative Studies, majoring in biology with a neuroscience focus. I am having fun researching the role of a membrane protein called Syntaxin in both cancer and the poliovirus life cycles in the Weimbs Lab.

Grace Pan
Harvard-Westlake ‘16
Harvard Univ. ‘20

Despite all of the distressing events in the news this year, it’s reassuring to know that STF is out there ready to respond. I finished my second year of political philosophy at Harvard. I started my summer internship in Windhoek, Namibia, teaching at an afterschool program for underserved youth called Physically Active Youth Namibia and writing an education policy paper for consideration by the Ministry of Education.

Mackenzie Wright
Intern ‘16
Occidental College ‘16

After the last few years with City Year LA, I will start USC’s Master of Social Work graduate program with a concentration in social change and innovation this fall! The program has a heavy focus on policy and improving living conditions and work environments for individuals, families, organizations and communities. My passion for human rights is definitely going to be expanded!

Colby Tunick
Academy of the Canyons ‘14
San Diego State Univ. ‘18

I have been happily married since November and am a researcher for the Center for Information Convergence and Strategy where I focus on trade, security and customs policy in San Diego. I also work for DME Business Solutions as an international grant consultant, and in a business development and government affairs role for Voyager Space Technologies, a startup working on automating the spacecraft design process.

Matthew Ware
Santa Monica ‘14
Yale Univ. in Singapore ‘18

Before graduating from Yale-National University of Singapore, I completed my capstone project, “Between Altruism, Need and Strategy: Tracing China’s Global Climate Aid.” I’m still researching student activism and grassroots organizing in Singapore, which I’d like to continue in graduate school. While at NUS, I planned an event with ex-political detainees, which was exciting and nerve-wracking because the very same week, another event was shut down by the police for talking to Joshua Wong, the activist from “Joshua: Teenager vs. Superpower”. I intend to go on to earn a Master’s in History or Southeast Asian Studies, but in the meantime, I will improve my Bahasa Indonesia, which I just started learning.

Lizbeth Molina
Intern ‘17
CSU Northridge ‘16
M.S. Pepperdine Univ. ‘17

Next year, I will join Teach For America, and in the meantime, I am working with United Farm Worker Foundation (UFWF), an organization part of the farmworker movement of Cesar Chavez that has fought for the rights of farmworkers, immigrant workers and the Latino community for 50 years.

Karina Duarte
Palisades Charter ‘14
Kalamazoo College ‘18

I think one of the most jarring parts of being home is watching the news with my family and feeling the heavy silence everytime we listen to a story about a deportation, an ICE raid, or the injustice of the detention centers. I look at all the adulter adults in my household who gave up so much to get here--who defied death and compromised life in order to gain the opportunity to simply LIVE it, safe and free. I hurt for those who die or are suppressed when they are just about to make it. I praise the powers that be for helping those who have been able to get here. I am angry for how disposable we view other lives. I am outraged by the treatment endured by little children that we are so ignorant to. Our world is in pain. What are we going to do about it?

For More STF Alumni Updates:
www.hrwstf.org “Our Alumni”