

From Migrant Worker to Literacy Academy Director

How a Barbara Bush Family Literacy Academy helped make Angelica Ibarra's extraordinary journey possible. ...

At age 12, Angelica Ibarra came to America from Mexico with her family in pursuit of the "American Dream." Thirty years ago she was a child picking strawberries in the fields of Plant City, Florida. Her parents needed her help simply to make ends meet. As migrant workers, they followed the crop seasons. As a result, Angelica was forced to switch schools often. The lack of continuity in her educational environment made learning very difficult. To make matters worse, her family lacked the education to help her at home.

In the 7th grade, Angelica's father decided she knew enough English to translate for the family. He made her drop out of school, saying, "School is a waste of time for poor people. Doctors and lawyers never come from families like ours."

He also told her he wasn't going to educate his daughters so that some other man could reap the benefits.

By age 15, she ran away from home and became the young mother of two. Years of struggling and raising children as a single mom took its toll. In her '20s, she decided it was time to give education another try.

Angelica was fortunate to find a Barbara Bush Family Literacy Academy in Tampa, a program that welcomed

her with open arms and welcomed her young children, too. She earned her GED. Then—with the urging of her caring teachers—she did something she never imagined she could. Angelica enrolled in community college. From there she transferred to the University of South Florida and earned a bachelor's degree.

That Barbara Bush Family Literacy Academy gave Angelica a second chance. She became a college graduate, and as a mother was more prepared to help her own children learn and to pursue education.

Now she's paying it forward, empowering others with the same second chance—and inspiration—she received. Today, we are fortunate to have her as director at our Family Literacy Academy in Tampa Bay. It's really a fairy tale come true that she teaches in the same community where she toiled in the fields as a child.

Angelica recalls: "I never forgot



Angelica Ibarra journeyed from the strawberry fields of Plant City, Fla., to Director of a Barbara Bush Family Literacy Academy.

"After my graduation ceremony, my father told me for the first time in my life that he was proud of me. And as he said it, tears fell from his eyes."

—Angelica Ibarra

my roots and remember just how far I have come. When I graduated from USF my entire family attended the commencement ceremony. After my graduation ceremony, my father told me for the first time in my life that he was proud of me. And as he said it, tears fell from his eyes." ○