Nayeli Casteñada planned to follow in her grandfather’s footsteps of being a doctor. A junior in high school, she was accepted into an internship at Kaiser Permanente. As she was filling out the paperwork, however, her mother had to break the news that Casteñada didn’t have a Social Security card because she was undocumented.

“At the time, I didn’t even really know what it meant to be undocumented. It wasn’t really talked about,” she said. “My dreams were kind of shattered.”

At 18, Casteñada became pregnant with her first child. “That’s when I realized I needed to go to college and get a higher education to be able to provide for her.”

Casteñada enrolled in a community college through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, and earned her associate degree. She then applied to several universities to pursue a nursing degree. Sacramento State was her top choice because the University also accepted her daughter—specifically, into the ASI Children’s Center.

“I felt that they were seeing that I wasn’t a traditional student and that there was support for me,” she said. “They were seeing me as me, and not just the student number; that was really big for me.”

Casteñada also credits the University Library as being a tremendous source of support while she obtained her undergraduate degree and, now, as she pursues her master’s degree in counseling. Namely the Library’s family study rooms—with their child-size desks and chairs, children’s books, a sink, and comfortable furniture—were a big help for Casteñada and her two children.

“It’s created a huge impact for me because I’m able to continue to meet my responsibilities as a student without neglecting my responsibilities as a parent,” she said.

Casteñada says the space, which is funded by donations to the University, shows that the entire Sacramento State community—from administrators and faculty to donors and alumni—is thinking about students who have young children, like her, and supporting their learning needs. Seeing how the community has helped her, she is determined to stay in the area so she can give back.

“Hopefully, with my degree, I’ll be able to serve the community that has helped me to grow, not just personally but professionally,” she said. “Looking at the end goal, one day I want to be in a position to be that helping hand, like those who were there to help me.”