

When ENB first met the **Barrios family** in 2007, the children were learning by day at Gardner Pilot Academy (GPA), a pre-K-8 school in Allston, while their parents, **Deni and Sandra**, studied English by night at GPA Adult Education Program.

The parents struggled to keep their family unified, and to support the kids in school. By the time they reached level 2 in English classes, Deni Jr. was a doting son: ***“He knows a lot of English now and I am very proud of him!”*** and Deni Sr. had joined the Parent Council.

This year, we revisited the family as part of our **20th Anniversary Series** and were delighted to find two Barrios children are professionals who teach and counsel children and families at GPA. Their parents, who still live a two-minute walk from the school, can think of no greater way for their family to give back to the community that supported them.

Twenty-two years ago, Deni and Sandra came to the United States, seeking a better life for their children. Guatemala wasn't safe, and wages were abysmal. Both have worked hard here, Sandra cleaning houses and Deni first in a metal parts factory, and now at an auto body shop.

2007



2022



They succeeded in sending all five children to college, while teaching them to always give back. Deni and Sandra instilled the importance of caring for others, having respect for all, and never giving up. ***“They helped those who were even more in need than we were.” --Debbi Barrios, daughter***

Thanks to years of ESOL classes, Deni and Sandra speak English readily at their jobs. Deni is in constant communication with managers at the body shop. Sandra, who had studied to be a lawyer in Guatemala, stresses the importance of being able to chat with customers and build relationships.

Outside of work, English helped Sandra and Deni meet with their children’s teachers. And unfortunately, they also needed to communicate frequently with doctors. One daughter survived a brain tumor. Sandra remembers how supportive the school community was during that time.

Two of Deni and Sandra’s children will soon complete Bachelor’s degrees. Others pursued Master’s degrees in careers to help people. While studying social work, the youngest, Sheyla, provided childcare for the parents learning at GPA Adult Education Program, the English for New Bostonians ESOL site where her parents studied English. She worked with families who didn’t speak much English: ***“Being able to translate for them is such a gift!”*** Sheyla witnessed how important English classes have been for families, helping them with work, shopping, and accessing resources.

Debbi completed her Master’s at Boston University. She’s a social worker with Home for Little Wanderers, assigned at GPA. ***“I help kids that look just like me, help parents just like mine. Without understanding the culture, they wouldn’t be able to trust me the way they do. They realize I am just like them.”***

Debbi emphasizes how programs like the Gardner enable families to advance themselves, stay connected and give back to others.

“Immigrants come for one dream, and English classes allow more access to that dream.”

Every member of Deni and Sandra’s family understands how hard the parents have worked, and the ripple effect of English programs on their own family and so many others. Debbi believes ***“more funding would enable people to access education here in America.”*** Sadly, she and her parents see immigrants facing discrimination and struggling harder than when their family came 22 years ago. ***English classes are all the more important, to offer a welcome mat and a gateway to opportunities.***

“We are PART of BOSTON now,” Debbi states.