

## Strangers No Longer Eddie Essay

By: Olivia Pineda-Andersen

Imagine this: you can't afford groceries, but you are hopeful that you'll be able to supply your kids food by transferring them to a nearby public school that gives out free meals. But, you're unable to enroll them in that school, or even legally drive them to their current school! In addition to all this, when your paycheck finally comes, you can't cash it at the bank because you don't have an acceptable ID. Sadly, this is the reality of many migrant workers in Michigan who are permitted to work here and are required to pay the same taxes as American citizens, but due to their immigration status, are not allowed to have a state ID card or a driver's license.

*Strangers No Longer* has been working tirelessly to help these people be seen as equals and help the migrant workers in any way possible. *Strangers No Longer* worked for years advocating for the Drive Safe Bills, which would make it possible to acquire a driver's license, regardless of immigration status, with certain documentation like a consular card, valid passport, or birth certificate from a foreign country. This would revert the law to how it was, prior to the 2007 Michigan Attorney General's opinion, which "...had the immediate effect of denying licenses to all people who are undocumented..." and was put to action in early 2008. *Strangers No Longer* also arranges "Circles of Support" which aim to educate the parishes on human policies, immigrant issues, and give support to the families of migrant workers or undocumented immigrants, as well as others affected.

I learned all of this when I went on an immersion trip with *Strangers No Longer* to Traverse City during July of 2023, alongside my Boyne Valley Catholic Community youth group. On this trip, I slept on the floor of a church basement where I slept without access to a shower for three days, I attended a mass in Spanish alongside the migrants we were working with, I visited their workplaces— the Leelanau Fruit Company's processing facility, various wineries, and farms. I was astonished by the generosity of these kind hearted people, hosting our group in their homes and feeding us. Even with the little they have they were so openhanded and gave us many gifts, their lessons and stories being the greatest gift. I even shopped where they shop, at the TC Latino grocery store, and I visited the Impressive Cuts Salon where they speak Spanish and English and specialize in working with dark, thick, curly, hair to cater to the latino population of Traverse. It was an eye opening adventure for me and my friends. When we came home after hearing the migrant worker's stories and why they need the Drive Safe Bills, we created presentations together to show at my friends' churches in the Detroit area, in attempt to help pass these urgently important bills into law.

My church and the BVCC youth group are extremely fortunate. Our parish is overwhelmingly generous with their donations, so we are almost always able to fundraise for our mission trips and to attend National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis, so we are rarely required to pay out-of-pocket in order to experience these trips that help us grow in our faith. But, this is not

the case for all youth interested in pursuing philanthropy through the Catholic church, which is why I believe *Strangers No Longer* deserves the Eddie Essay Contest award. They would use this money towards scholarships for students interested in going on an immersion trip during the summer of 2025, to learn more about migrant farm and dairy workers who live in Mid-Michigan.

While I recognize that there are many amazing young writers in this area, I would be incredibly grateful if the folks at *Strangers No Longer* were awarded the Eddie money. All of them are so dedicated and passionate about what they do, but especially Amy Ketner. She's amazing at her job, and she helps so many people. It would bring me immense joy for her and her organization to receive this award, because Amy is so deserving and it would help to develop the next generation of Catholic philanthropists like her.

My best wishes go to all the members of the Kiwanis Club, I appreciate you and thank you for all of your time and consideration.