Gustavo Velasco immigrated to the U.S. from Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico in 2000 when he was 14 years old. Initially, he had been hoping that he might eventually qualify for permanent residency through his mother who had to first gain her own permanent residency through a sibling who had become (had naturalized as) a U.S. citizen. [An I-130 petition allows a US citizen to sponsor an adult sibling for permanent residency, though it can take many years to be approved]. But shortly after Gustavo’s arrival 9/11 happened and sibling petitions were backed up as long as 7 to 10 years. In 2012 or sometime soon after that, he was able to obtain Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status. He has to reapply and pay fees every couple of years. He still hopes that he will eventually be able to gain permanent residency through his mother or now, his U.S.-born sister. He was 37 at the time of the interview. If he’d obtained a green card he would have pursued a medical career. Gustavo is a chef and owns a successful catering business, employing others. Gustavo has worked and gone to school since he came to the U.S.

In his interview, Gustavo reflects on life in Mexico and in the U.S. He shares fond memories of his childhood in Mexico, selling chickens at the market with his father and spending summers on the beaches of Guadalajara. Regarding his time in the U.S., he shares the frustration of his on-going DACA status. He has to reapply every two years, paying an application fee. He has to apply a few months before it expires and when it’s renewed the date is not when it would have expired, but a few months short. So he is really applying every 18 months or so. It’s expensive and time consuming. Gustavo explains the difficulties of finding good employees and the seasonal nature of his business.

Gustavo is passionate about seeing people as humans, not just by categories of race or ethnicity. He thinks there are numerous opportunities in the US, but feels we have not moved ahead to support everyone as well as we could. He misses his family in Mexico and can’t visit them as he worries he may not be allowed to return to the US. He has volunteered with many organizations and works to have a positive attitude and be grateful. Gustavo feels that immigrants need help to heal trauma from immigration – transition, escaping abuse, violence, not getting to see family especially grandparents, etc. who pass without getting to see them again or say goodbye.

Summary by Jackie Reilly, UUFNN Borderlands Justice Team.