

Himar Hernandez – Spain Born in the Canary Islands, Himar came to Ottumwa as a high school foreign exchange student in 1993. After graduation, he returned to the Canary Islands, but kept in touch with a peer who would eventually become his wife. He returned to the U.S. to attend Indian Hills Community College where he received his associate degree and later when on to earn his Bachelor's and Master's degrees at William Penn University. Himar has worked as a Program Facilitator for the Iowa 8th Judicial District, an adjunct teacher at Indian Hills Community College, and as the Iowa Program Director for the New Iowan Center. He now works at the Iowa State University Extension Service as a Community and Economic Development Specialist. Himar has had an exceptional impact as a connector and communicator with immigrant and refugee residents in the Ottumwa area. "First generation immigrants are very entrepreneurial," Himar says, "but minority business owners face very big challenges. Permits and regulations, language, where do they get funding to expand, how do you keep books? And I try to get them to market to more [than just] the Latino community." At present, there are over 25 Latino-owned businesses in Ottumwa, which have contributed to reversing Ottumwa's population decline and increasing the financial stability of the area.

Sandra Sanchez – Mexico Sandra is one of the most recognized, trusted and experiences leaders on immigrant rights in Iowa. Born in a suburb of Mexico City, she and her family moved to Iowa during a time of economic crisis in Mexico. She taught herself English and enrolled her two children in school. After a student yelled racially charged threats at her and her son, she knew changes needed to be made regarding safety, diversity training, and communication for non-English speaking students. In 1991 she was hired by Des Moines Public Schools to bridge the gap between families and the district. Sandra was instrumental in the creation of many organizations and programs, including the Iowa Immigration Education Coalition, the Immigrant Safety Net, and United for the Dignity and Safety of Immigrants. She also has a weekly radio program and writes for publications in the U.S. and abroad. As the Director of the Immigrants Voice Program with the American Friends Service Committee, she communicated with legislators, the media, government agencies, and immigrants on issues of rights and well-being.

Dekow Sagar – Somalia Dekow's life in Somalia was shattered in 1992 when he was 8 years old. A militia from a rival tribe attacked his village, destroying his home and killing, raping and torturing his family and neighbors. In a bold moment when the guard imprisoning his family was looking away, Dekow found a knife and cut the ropes tying his father. The family escaped, ending up in a refugee camp in Kenya. Dekow completed his high school degree while in Kenya and was then hired by Doctors Without Borders as a community health worker in the Hagadera refugee camp. At just 19 years old, he directed an anti-female genital mutilation and gender-based violence project. Dekow is now living in Des Moines, working as a Community Outreach liaison for the Des Moines Public Schools. He received his BA from Grand View University and a master's from Drake University. He empowers and enriches others by organizing driver's education initiatives for women, going on home visits to students who have unexcused absences and working with their family to determine and solve the issues preventing the student from getting to school. He refuses to give up on students. Dekow works every day to ensure Des Moines students have the opportunities he worked so hard for.

Grace Zhenhuan Yang – China The year Grace was born in Chengdu, China, and earthquake struck. In honor of this, her grandparents chose the name Zhenhuan, meaning “shake the world.” This name could not be more fitting, as Grace went on to have an incredible impact on her community. Grace graduated from Chengdu University and obtained work as a website administrator. In the interest of furthering her education, Grace came to Drake University in 2003. Graduating with a degree in Public Administration, she went to work for Bankers Trust, working as a Creative Design Specialist. A self-taught artist, Grace immediately began volunteering for several non-profits, sharing her time and graphic talents with Entrepreneurs Summit, Network Against Human Trafficking and the Chinese Association of Iowa. From creating materials to teach financial literacy and career introduction in six local elementary schools to event planning, graphic design and photography, Grace always finds a way to contribute. Grace says her volunteer work is her way of paying forward the help and kindness she was shown as an immigrant to Iowa.