

## ADVOCATING FOR CHILDREN IN PALM BEACH COUNTY



Christie Riganati was just 13 when her older sister died in a car accident. The death of 20-year-old Staci Riganati devastated her family and left her little sister feeling lost and unsure how to deal with her feelings.

When she returned to Logger's Run Middle School in Boca Raton a week later, she was called to the guidance counselor's office. She didn't know who the guidance counselor was and felt scared at first, but the woman, a social worker named Barbara DeWolfe, would prove to be the lifeline she desperately needed.

"She was really there for me, more than anyone could be at the time because my whole family was torn apart," said Riganati, 22, who recently earned her bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary social science from FAU, with a minor in history. "She was my support at the time."

The experience inspired Riganati to pay that kindness forward by becoming a guidance counselor herself. She began working on her master's degree in counselor education at FAU's College of Education in January.

Riganati recalled how DeWolfe helped her deal with her emotions after her sister's death. It was okay to grieve, but it was also perfectly acceptable to be happy when good things happened to her. The guidance counselor's office was her safe zone.

"That was a turning point in my life. Anything could have happened. I could have lost hope. Instead it motivated me, thankfully," Riganati said. "Since then, anytime something good happens in my life, I think back to her and what would have happened if she didn't call me down to her office. From the difference she made in my life, I want to be that difference. Even if it's for one child, when their life could have went for the worst, I want to be the reason it went the good route and what changed their life."

Excerpt from [http://www.fau.edu/explore/homepage-stories/2015\\_01children.php](http://www.fau.edu/explore/homepage-stories/2015_01children.php)

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