



Address at the 2016 Path Awards

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on April 19, 2016**



This speech was presented to the attendees of the Robert Stempel College of Public Health & Social Work 10th annual Path Awards Luncheon held at the Treetop Ballrooms, Jungle Island on April 19, 2016.

This is the 10th anniversary of the Path Awards, a tradition that was put in place with two goals:

First, to recognize exemplary organizations and individuals working in dietetics, public health and social work in order to raise awareness of the need for public health professionals, organizations and programs.

Second, to raise the much-needed scholarship funds that will help our students stay on of advancing health and social welfare.

These are both great goals, but why are they important? Why should they matter to each and every person in this room? Well, I'm going to tell you...

There are people in South Florida – some who live in our very own neighborhoods – who lack health and the ability and resources to advocate for themselves. This is just one reason we need to raise awareness of the need for public health professionals, organizations and programs. Sometimes the people who need help are easy to spot. Other times, they're hidden in our midst.

That was the case with FIU student Vanessa Morales. For two months, Vanessa, a junior at FIU studying elementary education, had been living in her car in the parking lot of the student health center. She showered at the FIU gym and ate food from the Fresh Food Company, where she worked. Vanessa never wanted to think of herself as homeless.

At 21, Vanessa found herself with nowhere to live after her parents divorced and her father, unemployed, drinking heavily and in a deep depression, told her she had to move out to make room for his new girlfriend. She never asked anyone for help because she figured there were plenty of people facing worse circumstances.

If Vanessa had not been found sleeping in her car by campus police, she would probably have never gotten the help she needed from the team at FIU's Fostering Panther Pride. But thankfully, she did, and now she has a place to call home.

At FIU, it is our job to ensure that there will be new professionals in nutrition, public health and social work who will be able to identify and address health disparities, no matter how well hidden they are.

As a community, it's our responsibility to reach out to the "Vanessas" in our midst. And one way to do that is through your donation to help train future professionals who will help those who need it most.

This is work that Dean Emerita Michele Ciccazzo, the recipient of the 2016 10-Year Robert Stempel Award, accomplished during her 35 years in higher education. It is work that FIU Stempel College's new dean, Tomás Guilarte, will continue to do for many years to come.

I congratulate the 10 individuals being recognized today. They each have noteworthy accomplishments, and they have each used their positions and talents to help solve problems in our community and around the world. I want to remind you that your donation can help the next generation of problem solvers accomplish great things and do great work as well.

Thank you!