



## Staten Islander of the Week: Mentor to Young Girl in Need

By Bree Driscoll

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They're not related by blood but two Staten Island girls say the bond they share sure feels like family.

"No. There's no leaving her. There is none," said Amanda Tavaréz.

She first met Samantha 4 years ago when she signed up to volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters.

"I didn't know what the experience would be like until I actually met her and ever since then it was just amazing," said Tavaréz.

The national organization pairs kids with mentors to help keep them on the right track.

For Samantha, she says the day Tavaréz came into her life ... things started looking up.

"I was doing good in school but now I'm doing really good and I listen more, I clean more when my dad asks me to," said Samantha.

The girls meet at least once a month to just hang out or talk or to head-out for some sisterly fun.

"We go get our nails done, we go to the park, she tries to get me to go to the library but I say no," said Samanta.

She says her mother hasn't been around much.

So when Tavaréz came into the picture, she says she was happy to have someone to talk to - even if it does include some discipline from time to time.

"Amanda goes 'why did you do that we need to talk'," said Samantha. Amanda interrupts, "But I say it nicer don't I?" Samantha replies, "Sometimes. It depends on the issue."

Samantha says with Tavaréz by her side ...she was able to overcome some big hurdles. "My mother isn't here and I used to get kind of sad, not that sad like my sister, but I got kinda sad and then after I found her I didn't feel so sad and I'm not that sad anymore."

Tavaréz says the whole experience has left a positive mark on her own life. "It's amazing it's rewarding it's everything."

And so, for changing lives for the better --- family or not, Amanda Tavaréz is our Staten Islander of the Week.