

## Corsage Project Outfits Over 200 Girls For Their Graduation Dance



Left to Right: Carmen Celestini, senior manager of events with the Children's Aid Foundation and Rebecca Llewellyn, manager of development and community.

The majority of us have fond memories of our formal night, with the fashion disasters and the pictures to prove it. The final graduation dance of high school marks an important milestone in a student's life, and an expensive one. The outfit, the flowers, and even the ticket to the event can cost upwards of a few hundred dollars. This is a considerable amount of money for anyone, but more so for those on a low income.

Recognizing the fact that some girls can't afford to take part with their peers in their graduation dance, the Corsage Project was created in 1999 to help those girls by taking care of the cost. The program has expanded since then to make grad night dreams come true for over 200 girls in the Toronto community.

The girls are nominated by a children's aid worker, a guidance counselor or a teacher. Fifteen to twenty per cent of the girls are referred by a children's aid worker, while the rest are through the school system. Picked on a first come, first serve basis, the highlight is attending the

Boutique Ball, which occurs in April. The Boutique Ball is the culmination of months of planning and effort on the part of the Corsage Project and the Children's Aid Foundation to provide the girls with a relaxed and fun afternoon to find that perfect dress.

The dresses are provided brand new by generous corporate sponsors. You won't find any vintage 80's throwbacks here. At this year's Boutique Ball, there was already a line of girls waiting to get in an hour before the doors were to open. And with a staggering 700 dresses available for the 200 girls attending, the chance of finding not just a dress, but the dress, is inevitable. "It's just like one big mall," says Rebecca Llewellyn, manager of development and community with the Children's Aid Foundation. Both Llewellyn and Carmen Celestini, senior manager of events with the Foundation, volunteered as personal shoppers at this year's Boutique Ball. As personal shoppers, they were on hand to provide the girls with advice and prevent fashion disasters.

With this being Llewellyn's first year with the Foundation, she was looking forward to the Boutique Ball, held on April 22. "I'm really excited about it, I feel privileged to volunteer," Llewellyn says. "You get to spend an entire day with these girls helping them pick out a dress and accessories. I've been told it's incredibly emotional, because by the end of the day, you've really bonded with them and heard their stories."



Corporate sponsors and volunteers are just a few of the elements that are vital to ensuring the continued success of this event. Carole Atkins, one of the Corsage Project organizers, says that "There is a slow but steady increase in corporate interest each year. We also have over 150 volunteers who act as personal shoppers plus many others who help with the set up and take down of the event".

Anybody interested in sponsoring this event for next year can contact the Children's Aid Foundation. For more information on how you can volunteer for the Boutique Ball, or nominate a girl for next year, check out the Corsage Project at [www.corsageproject.ca](http://www.corsageproject.ca) or the Children's Aid Foundation at [www.cafdn.org](http://www.cafdn.org).