

Fairy tale ending

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Walking into the Four Seasons ballroom dressed in a white, princess-style gown adorned with a sparkling jewel just above the waist, Emily Torres truly channeled Cinderella.

Last Friday evening, the 18-year-old Vancouver Technical secondary student danced the night away at her graduation dinner with zero guilt about the cost of her dress and matching accessories, even though her family is going through a tough time financially.

"Both my parents are not working due to medical problems," reveals Torres. "Our family's economic situation is not as good as we would like."

Enter the fairy godmother, also known as The Cinderella Project – a West Vancouver-based, non-profit organization that sends underprivileged students to grad in style.

"This past year has been a little harder," said Torres. "Grad would have been a stretch for me."

In February, Torres joined approximately 150 other Cinderellas and Cinderellas at the Renaissance Hotel in Vancouver, where, with the assistance of a "fairy godmother" or "godfather," each grad selected a gown, suit or tuxedo, shoes, a purse and accessories.

"This is not your bargain basement situation," explains Heather MacKenzie, co-executive director of The Cinderella Project. "For example this year we had a \$1,000 dress. This dress is to die for. It is turquoise with hand-beaded jewels."



Having a ball - Emily Torres gets pampered at La Donna Fina.

During Boutique Day, students also have their hair and makeup done and receive goodie bags full of essential toiletries and undergarments.

"This day really is something special for these kids," said MacKenzie. "The premise is that we really want them to see the light at the end of the tunnel."

The Cinderella Project celebrates its 10th anniversary this year having helped approximately 1,500 students in the Lower Mainland. Mackenzie recalls how there were 65 girls in the program and only 100 dresses that first year. Today, each girl has close to 10 dresses to choose from in her size.

Word of the Cinderella Project has also spread to approximately 80 other high schools throughout the U.S. and Canada which have called on the West Vancouver organization for assistance in getting similar programs off the ground in their communities.

Locally, the Cinderella Project relies solely on donations from sponsors and members of the community. The Project's other co-executive director, Cindy Given, says many North Shore businesses have given generous donations.

"It should also be noted that probably seventy-five per cent of our volunteers are from the North Shore," said Given.

One of this year's sponsors, La Donna Fina spa in West Vancouver, was the scene of Torres' makeover last week.

Her afternoon of pampering included a manicure and pedicure as well as some Xtreme Lashes. The individually applied eye lashes are currently the rage in Hollywood, explained the spa's owner, Lorna Mochinski.

"These will really make her (Torres) feel special," said Mochinski.

Dolena Thompson, certified Xtreme Lash Stylist, carefully applied Torres' new lashes and let out a laugh as she recalled the story of her own graduation dance.

"They pulled names out of a hat," said Thompson. "I was hooked up with the vice-principal's son."

Mochinski reveals that she suffered from low self-esteem when she was younger which is why it's so important for her to be involved with an organization such as the Cinderella Project.

"I think all young girls do (suffer from low self-esteem)," said Mochinski. "Make-up and pampering is a big self-esteem booster."

As for Torres' future, the morning of her makeover she received an acceptance letter from Langara College.

She will be taking general studies there this fall.

For more information on The Cinderella Project visit www.thecinderellaproject.com.

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