

## Cinderella Project Boutique Day

2010 – Vancouver’s Olympic Year - brought a touch of magic to our city, and the magic continues at this year’s Cinderella Project’s Boutique Day. Local Paralympic athlete, Andrea Holmes, will inspire the Cinderellas and Cinderfellas on their home stretch to graduation. The students in the Cinderella Project have already shown remarkable strength and tenacity overcoming hurdles not common to most eighteen-year-olds, to reach the finish line of their secondary education. April 25<sup>th</sup> is a day of recognition for them. On this day they will be completely outfitted for their high school graduation formals.

What does a grade 12 student do if they can’t afford to attend their high school graduation? In the lower mainland, the answer to this question used to be – they feel completely left out and they stay at home dreaming of what might have been. However, in 1999 the birth of the Cinderella Project – a 100% non-profit organization – changed all that. It is now possible for students who cannot afford to participate in their graduation formal to be referred by their high school counselors to this amazing program.

The Cinderella Project was started to help encourage youth to stay in school and achieve the milestone of high school graduation, giving young people the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty for themselves and their families. It is a magically simple concept; we know that youth in our community who are living in low income situations cannot afford to celebrate the graduation festivities alongside their fellow students, and as a result many of them don’t see the value in completing high school. These students are referred to the Cinderella Project by their teachers, principals or social workers to participate in a day of recognition, self-esteem boosting and mentorship.

The Cinderella Project works to remove social barriers and promote inclusiveness and diversity. Many of the Cinderellas and Cinderfellas are chronically ill or physically or developmentally challenged. More than two-thirds of those students who are physically able to work juggle multiple jobs before and after school to help support their families. Many are caring for ailing parents or raising younger siblings with little support. Most have never had a real childhood.

## **Fundraising and Sponsorship**

The Cinderella Project relies solely on financial and product support from individual donors and corporate sponsors to fund the program. One hundred percent of all merchandise and cash donations go directly towards operating and promoting the project.

## **Achievements to Date**

Since its inception in 1999, the Cinderella Project has assisted over 1600 young people from around Greater Vancouver. The impact of the Cinderella Project extends well beyond graduation ceremonies. It's truly remarkable how one day of encouragement and positive mentorship can have a long-term impact on a young person's confidence, self-esteem and outlook on life. Each year, the Cinderella Project receives numerous letters from parents, school counselors and teachers detailing the positive impacts the day has had on the graduates who participated. Equally touched by the Cinderella Project are parents, counselors, sponsors and project volunteers, many of whom return year after year to be part of this inspirational experience.

In 2008, the Cinderella Project was awarded the YMCA's Power of Peace, Local Peacemaker Award for 2008. In 2005, The Cinderella Project was the winner of the Lower Mainland Good Neighbour Award. The Cinderella Project was one of the three finalists for the prestigious Canadian Red Cross Power of Humanity Awards in 2004. Also in 2004, the Cinderella Project was runner-up for Flare Magazine's National Volunteer of the Year Award.

## **Spreading the Word**

The founders of Vancouver's Cinderella Project have generously shared their knowledge and experiences with others who wish to start similar organizations in other areas. There are now over 80 related projects across Canada and the USA including Toronto, Peterborough, the Peel Region of Ontario, Edmonton, Mission, Penticton, Kamloops, Kelowna, Victoria, Powell River, Campbell River, Comox Valley, Saskatoon and inquiries have been received from as far away as California and New Zealand.