

In with the old

Give your formal wear a second life and an underprivileged high school student a chance at a graduation.

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BLACK PRESS

The Cinderella Project has been making grad dreams come true for deserving twelfth-graders for seven years.

The volunteer-run charity was founded in 1999 by two West Vancouver lawyers, Heather MacKenzie and Cheryl Otto.

Every year the organization provides free formal attire and accessories to around 150 Lower Mainland high school graduates who could not otherwise afford to participate in the graduation ceremony.

A boutique day is held every April at the Vancouver Renaissance Hotel Harbourside, where students come to be outfitted with clothes, have their hair and makeup done, and pictures taken by some 200 volunteer photographers, hair stylists, makeup artists, seamstresses, tailors and "fairy godmothers" and "godfathers."

What makes the Cinderella Project special, explained MacKenzie, is that it is not just outfitting needy students with clothes, but is also, for one special day, providing much-needed community support and mentorship for disadvantaged youth.

Most have them have overcome adver-



sity to graduate, and MacKenzie said that is something that should be celebrated.

"Statistically more students drop out in the last half of Grade 12 than in any other year in high school," she said. Sometimes the support they get from project volunteers is the extra bit of incentive they need to finish school.

Students, known as Cinderellas and Cinderfellas, are referred to the project by teachers, principals, school counsellors or social service agencies throughout the Lower Mainland, and are accepted based

on existing hardship.

"What we've been hearing from these students is that it's a life-changing thing," MacKenzie said. "This will be our eighth grad class, and what we're seeing is some of the Cinderellas and Cinderfellas we've helped in the past are coming back as volunteers... and we can see first hand that it truly changed their lives."

Dresses can be dropped off at the West Vancouver United Church (2062 Esquimalt Ave.) between 8:30 a.m. and noon and from 1 to 4 p.m. Monday to Thursday. Call 604-922-9171.