



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Cinderella Project Works Magic for Lower Mainland Grads**

*Local non-profit organization provides formalwear to more than 150 students in need*

**Vancouver, B.C.** – While most high school seniors are concerned with getting good grades and making the football team, hundreds of teenagers across the Lower Mainland face some very adult challenges. They're busy putting food on the family table, raising younger siblings or fighting life-threatening illnesses. For these young people, the luxury of celebrating their graduation is a financial impossibility and a distant dream.

Thanks to the efforts of a dedicated group of "Fairy Godparents" from Greater Vancouver's Cinderella Project, however, students like these will be able to attend their graduation festivities with pride. This Sunday, April 18, more than 150 students will gather at the Vancouver Renaissance Harbourside Hotel to select suits, gowns and accessories, receive tips for grad hairstyles and makeup and be recognized and rewarded for their achievements.

Now in its fifth year, the Cinderella Project was founded by Vancouver human rights lawyers Heather MacKenzie and Cheryl Otto. Mackenzie says the Cinderella Project is about much more than gowns and tuxedos – it's about encouragement, confidence building and positive mentorship. Nearly half of all "Cinderellas" and "Cinderfellas" are chronically ill or disabled. More than two-thirds of those who can work juggle multiple part-time jobs to help support their families. Some are single parents. Many care for ailing parents or raise younger siblings with little support. The Cinderella Project acknowledges and rewards these young people for staying in school and graduating despite overwhelming odds.

Since the Cinderella Project does not receive ongoing government funding, the group relies solely on donations from individuals and organizations to operate the program and hold its annual Boutique Day. The project is 100% volunteer-based – there are no paid positions.

For more information about the Cinderella Project, call 604-603-9155 or visit [www.thecinderellaproject.com](http://www.thecinderellaproject.com).

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## **About the Cinderella Project**

Founded in 1999, the Cinderella Project is a federally registered charity based in Vancouver, B.C. that provides graduation attire to underprivileged students who otherwise could not afford to attend their high school graduation ceremonies. The organization recognizes outstanding young people who have succeeded in the face of overwhelming odds and boosts their self-esteem through respect and positive mentorship. The project receives no regular government funding and relies solely on the support of individual and corporate donors and sponsors.

The first project of its kind in Canada, Vancouver's Cinderella Project has inspired a number of similar organizations across Canada and around the world. The project has been nominated as a finalist in the Canadian Red Cross Power of Humanity Awards program and is a semi-finalist in the 2004 FLARE Volunteer Awards.

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## About the Cinderella Project

- The Cinderella Project is a federal, volunteer-based charity founded in Vancouver, B.C. in 1999 by Heather MacKenzie and Cheryl Otto.
- The Cinderella Project provides underprivileged high school graduates with formal attire so they can attend their graduation festivities with pride. Without assistance, these students could not afford to participate in celebrating this important milestone.
- The Cinderella Project works to remove social barriers and promote inclusiveness and diversity. It recognizes outstanding young people who have succeeded in the face of overwhelming odds and boosts their confidence and self esteem through respect and positive mentorship.

## The Students: Cinderellas and Cinderfellas

- Each year, 150+ Cinderellas and Cinderfellas are referred to the Cinderella Project by school counselors, teachers, principals or social services agencies throughout the Greater Vancouver area. Representing a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds, these students are accepted into the Cinderella program based upon existing hardship.
- Nearly half of all Cinderellas and Cinderfellas are chronically ill or physically or developmentally disabled. 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. Some are single parents, struggling to complete high school. Many are caring for ailing parents or raising younger siblings with little support. Most have never had a childhood.

## Boutique Day

- Throughout the year, the Cinderella Project collects donations of new and used formal wear. Each spring, the project holds a "Boutique Day" in a ballroom donated free of charge by the Vancouver Renaissance Hotel Harbourside.
- Cinderellas and Cinderfellas come to the hotel from across the Lower Mainland to select their graduation outfits and celebrate their achievements. With the assistance of a "fairy godmother" or "godfather", each grad selects a gown, suit or tuxedo, shoes, purse and accessories. Students have their hair and makeup done and receive goodie bags full of essential toiletries, socks, etc. They are fussed over and pampered – often for the first time in their lives.
- The Cinderella Project sees Boutique Day not as a handout but rather a way to acknowledge the fact that these outstanding students have achieved a significant milestone and overcome significant challenges to do so. The students spend the day with positive role models celebrating their success and discussing their future plans.
- Since Boutique Day is about respecting and celebrating diversity, the venue is wheelchair accessible and located near public transit. The project provides godparents who know sign language or have experience working with the visually impaired. The selection of available formal wear includes outfits appropriate to a variety of cultures.

## **Our Volunteers**

- The Cinderella Project is run solely by volunteers – there are no salaried employees.
- Volunteers come from a diverse range of backgrounds and each brings a different set of unique skills and experiences to the project.
- A core group of approximately 10 volunteers look after the day-to-day operations of the program.
- At Boutique Day, more than 150 volunteers including hairstylists, makeup artists, disc jockeys, seamstresses, tailors, photographers, and fairy godmothers and godfathers gather to create a memorable experience for Cinderellas and Cinderfellas.

## **Fundraising and Sponsorship**

- The Cinderella Project relies solely on financial and product support from sponsors to fund the program. One hundred percent of the merchandise and funds donated by sponsors goes directly towards operating and promoting the project.
- To supplement donations from individual and corporate sponsors, the Cinderella Project holds its own fundraising events each year.

## **Achievements to Date**

- Since its inception in 1999, the Cinderella Project has assisted approximately 600 young people from across the B.C. Lower Mainland. The program helps approximately 150 graduates each April at Boutique Day.
- The impact of the Cinderella Project extends well beyond graduation ceremonies. It is 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 explaining 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 come back year after year to be part of this inspirational experience.

## **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 related projects in Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton, Calgary, Kamloops, Penticton, Victoria, Campbell River, Nanaimo and Courtenay and inquiries have been received from as far away as California and New Zealand.

***For more information about the Cinderella Project, visit [www.thecinderellaproject.com](http://www.thecinderellaproject.com), or contact:***

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