

## Children and Family Services

# Children and Family Services Makes Prom a Reality for Foster Youth

HS Connection Staff

A high school prom is a memorable and exciting event, but buying a dress or tuxedo, getting hair and make-up done and preparing for the event can be expensive and something not all teens get to experience. However, attending the prom is now a reality for more than 80 San Bernardino County foster youth.



San Bernardino County's Children and Family Services (CFS) Independent Living Program (ILP) hosted two Prom Extravaganzas for the County's ILP foster and probation youth. The West-End region's Extravaganza was at Abundant Living Family Church in Rancho Cucamonga and was attended by 50 ILP youth. The High Desert prom event, at First Baptist Church in Hesperia, attracted another 34 youth.

"These events provided the basic tools for these young men and young ladies to learn the techniques of tying a tie, putting on a suit, wearing make-up, fixing their hair, getting the opportunity to pick out a dress," said Supervising Social Service Practitioner Hugo Castellanos. "We make sure they have a great feel for the upcoming events at their high schools, build their self-esteem and make sure they have the foundation to prepare themselves for this special day at their high schools."



The ladies attending the Rancho Cucamonga event received free hairstyles and make-up by Marinello's School of Beauty. Victor Valley Beauty College students provided hairstyles and make-up to the High Desert youth. Gayanne Moloian, a make-up artist and a former foster youth, attended both events and shared her story with the foster youth.

"I don't do my makeup very much, so it was very helpful," said Leah, a foster youth. "My hair is very difficult, but the lady worked with it and she complimented me and it felt really good to be pampered for a day."

Each teenage girl also had a choice of a prom dress from a selection of over 500 dresses, shoes, jewelry and more. The dresses were donated, dry cleaned or purchased by the Children's Fund.

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Volunteers helped them find the right dresses and accessories.

“You could tell when they found the right dress- their eyes lit up and a little smile would sneak up on them,” said Peer and Family Assistant Crystal Alvarez. “It was a joy to be a part of.”

The young men selected a shirt, tie, socks, belt, slacks or a tuxedo voucher for their prom night; some even got a hair cut at the Extravaganza. Resources were also available at the event to help youth with additional prom needs.



“They taught you how to be a man, rules of etiquette and they let us know tips on how to wear a tie and dress shirt,” said Justyn, a foster youth. “They were giving us tips on how to interact with the opposite gender- to be confident, but not too confident, to just be yourself and to be kind and compassionate to other people.”

The Extravaganza continued after lunch with the help of CSUSB’s Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority who taught the young men how to tie a tie and demonstrated some important mannerisms and tips on etiquette for prom night.

The day concluded with several raffles for additional essential items for prom. The Independent Living Program serves youth ages 16-18 in foster care and also helps emancipated foster youth up to age 21.

ILP provides resources and incentives for youth to attend college, vocational training, assists with transportation, housing and other needs. For more information about the Independent Living Program call Cheryl Hill, ILP Coordinator at (909) 891-3679 or Alexey Blames, ILP Coordinator at (909) 891-3378.