Beardsley & Memorial Library

Teens

|

Young Adult

Once Upon a Prom

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$101-250

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Byline

Emily Young, Teen Services Librarian, Beardsley & Memorial Library, Winsted, Conn.

Each year, we collect prom dress donations (from patrons and boutiques), and on three Saturdays in the spring, we put out racks of dresses for students in grades 11 and 12 to come in and “shop” from, all for free! We also have purses, shoes and jewelry from which they can choose. A hairstylist and makeup artist come in and give each of the girls a special makeover to inspire and teach them how to get ready for their prom night.

Something new we incorporated into our event this year was giving those who picked out a dress a special Prom Goody Bag filled with bobby pins, pimple patches, floss picks, combs, nail files, mints, clear elastics, niacinamide facial serum and makeup wipes. We also offered a second bag option filled with a coupon to Men’s Warehouse for $60 off rentals or 10% off a purchase, deodorant wipes, hair gel, cologne, mints, floss picks and pimple patches.

Advanced Planning

My goal each year is to reach even more people than the previous year and help as many students as I can find a beautiful dress they adore. All students deserve a special prom night, and it is a privilege to have a part in that. I start planning the program a few months in advance, thinking about all the big details in November, and by late December or early January, I try to have most of my plans finalized.

One of the biggest components to worry about is finding a reputable makeup artist and hair stylist and asking far enough in advance so they have availability for the program. I reach out to various hair salons and makeup studios to ask around or even put out a message on Facebook that I am looking for volunteers. I was very successful with posting on social media, as that is how I found all the volunteers helping me this year.

Those involved in the program were me, our library director, surrounding schools (they promote the program to their students), our wonderful patrons and local dress boutiques for the gown donations, our teen volunteers, the makeup artist and hair stylist volunteers, and even Men's Warehouse for creating a coupon just for our program!

In terms of the steps I took, I tried to start by finalizing three dates to run the program and then finding the makeup artists and hair stylists. Next, I created a flyer promoting the program and sent it to as many people in town as possible and schools in the towns over. I then began to promote dress donations even more and called boutiques seeking donations. I then bought all of the supplies needed for the goody bags.

After the teen volunteers put the baggies together, I created all the signs for the room to be hung up. About a week before the start date, my volunteers helped put the racks of dresses together and set up the entire room with me. We did experience an unexpected challenge this year, where the established makeup artist who was planning on attending our program, unfortunately, did not work out, so I had only a few days to come up with a plan B and find a new artist. Luckily, someone saw my post on Facebook and agreed to come, and she was incredible!

Marketing

I keep flyers up year-round about prom dress donations so patrons can donate their dresses to us if they wish, so everyone knows about this program well in advance. For the program itself, I put out flyers to our subscribers on Constant Contact, hang them up in our library, email them to all of the schools near us, including the surrounding towns, post them to our Facebook and Instagram and drive on the main street of our town handing out flyers to various businesses to promote it.

I start posting flyers around two months in advance to make sure the word gets out there and I continuously post up until the day before the program itself. We have been very successful this year, receiving plenty of attention on our social media. I would say we successfully got the word out; on the day of the program, we had students and their parents lining up outside the library doors waiting to come up, and we had a large crowd of roughly 60 patrons until the end.

Budgeting

I would say we spent around $220. We always buy small gifts for our hair stylist and makeup artist volunteers (there were two volunteers for the first two programs, so four total), such as a $25 gift card, a handwritten card and some chocolate. I also purchased snacks for all the students, including bags of chips, cookies and lemonade, so about $40 went towards this.

This year, we added the goody bags, which cost around $70 for all of the supplies for both option one and option two of the bags. The rest of the money went towards light decorations and gas expenses to pick up local dresses.

Day-of-event Activity

We begin setting up around three days in advance since it can be quite a bit of work to transform our library's program room completely. We have to remove all of the tables and chairs from the room, set up the racks and arrange them to fit all of the gowns. We unpack the dresses from all the bins, put them on hangers, and then organize them all by size.

We also have to sort through the shoes to find each match and sort them by size, then arrange them in order on a table. The same goes for the purses and jewelry. Small stations, including a table, chairs and extension cords, are also set up for the makeup artist and hairstylist.

We have a table in the hallway that is transformed into the food station, and I also put out display boards that showcase more makeup, hair and even nail design ideas paired with the business cards of the volunteers who are helping out. Using our room dividers, we set them up to resemble a dressing area for the students to try on dresses, including a large mirror and chair for convenience.

Signs are hung throughout the room, such as "Dressing Room," "Someone's in here! / The dressing room is open!", "Makeup artist: Ashley!", "Hair Stylist: Alana!", and "Snacks! Please be careful around the dresses!"

Myself, the library director and a group of teenage volunteers completed all of this, which unfortunately had to be taken down directly after the first program and put back up a few weeks later for the next. Our main challenge is finding the storage to keep the dresses, but luckily, we have found a space where we can slide the racks behind some dividers and hide them well until the next program. Moving the racks themselves, however, has proven to be quite difficult, as some of the long dresses get caught on the bottom. This would have been exceptionally difficult if I were doing this alone, but we figured it out through teamwork!

Program Execution

Here is a quick rundown of how we run our program:

The dresses on the racks are set up in an "aisle" format within our program room. Myself and the director, along with a volunteer or two, are downstairs to welcome everyone in and explain to them the setup of the dresses in terms of size (starts at 0 and goes up to 20+). We let everyone shop to get a sense of what we offer, but assure them that we are here if they have any questions. I walk around and ask if anyone needs help, and for those that do, I either help them find a style, size or color of a dress they want or help them get situated in the fitting room.

When they are done with dresses they are sure they do not want, I will put them back on a hanger properly and return them to the correct rack based on the size. When someone finds a dress they want, we wrap it into a bag and give them a goody bag of their choice. I also will go around and count who wants their hair and makeup done and create a list of names that the stylist and artist can go off of. This is an easy way to keep track of who is next in line and, at the end of the day, to see how many students we had at each station. The program usually calms down after a few hours, and we will begin cleaning up.

Over the years, hundreds of students have left with a dress they love. A few weeks ago in February was our first event of the year, and around 30 students took home a beautiful gown with roughly 60 attendees overall. The patrons are always very appreciative of the program, and we have had many parents come up to us and personally thank us for our work, expressing how much it has helped them financially. One mother explained to me that she could not afford to buy each of her twin girls a prom dress and that they wouldn't have been able to have their special night if it weren't for us.

I have absolutely achieved my goals, especially in hearing feedback such as this. My main mission was to help the students within our community, and I truly believe we have. This program is incredibly rewarding, and I highly recommend it to any librarian looking to provide for their young patrons.

Advice

My biggest piece of advice is to find volunteers or other staff members to help you. It is a lot of work setting up for this program, getting everything ready, and physically moving things around as well. I would also promote that you accept dress donations to your patrons, and reach out to as many local boutiques as possible to see if you can receive donations. If you ever receive dresses you don't think you can use in your program, donate them to the local thrift store! I would also offer this program more than once; we have had issues in the past where we had to set time aside for students to come in and look at the dresses outside of when we were running the program, and it took up a lot of our time.

Not everyone can attend one event, and this program is usually very well attended, so it is best if you can offer it as much as possible. If you are helping a student find a dress, make sure you express to them that it is completely okay if they dislike a dress. We have had situations where we can tell that a student feels bad outright saying they don't like a dress you suggested, so just reassure them that this is for *their* prom night and it doesn't affect us if they don't like a dress! You are there to find them a gown they love. Most importantly, HAVE FUN! It is such a joy to organize this event and brainstorm new creative ways to expand it.

If anyone has questions about running this program, they can email me at eyoung@beardsleylibrary.org.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images



Image









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Daebak, It’s K-Pop

Audiences:

Teens (13-16)
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Bridgerton Afternoon Tea

Audiences:

Adults (21 and up)