Teens Bring Smiles to Senior Citizens in Assisted Living Through Makeovers

BY PENNY ZHOU
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Rachel Doyle wasn’t thinking of changing the world when she started GlamourGals. After her grandmother passed away in a senior home in August 1999, she just wanted to see more smiles on the faces of elderly people in assisted living.

So Doyle, 17 at the time, brought her makeup to them, and her companionship.

“I wanted to take the things that I love and use them to make someone smile,” she told NTD.
At first, it was just herself and two friends. As a teenager, she didn’t realize how much of an impact her visits could have.

Then she met Faye, a senior in purple sweater who was totally unmoved no matter how Doyle danced circles around and tried to cheer her up. She didn’t talk, and she didn’t smile.

“I remember going home and feeling like I had failed,” Doyle said. The idea is just not gonna work, she thought.

That night, Doyle received a call from the senior home’s activities director.

“Hey, remember Faye from today?” The director went on about how Faye had been suffering from severe depression and had stopped eating.

“Well, actually, after the makeover, she had started eating again,” the director said.

Twenty years later today, the team has expanded into a national movement, organizing over 1,300 teen volunteers in 18 states to provide makeovers to women in seniors homes. Doyle and her gals have appeared on TV, in newspapers, and the Oprah magazine.

The 501c3 GlamourGals Foundation also raises funds through the #dough4good campaign to support their teen leadership program, where high school students are trained on working with seniors, entrepreneurship, and gratitude.
“Teens have found compassion in their lives through this program,” Doyle said, adding that they’ve also learned to empathize with others.

“Being a GlamourGals volunteer is being a good listener,” she said.

“It’s a decompression for me, but it’s also a decompression for them,” said Alexandra Ramotar, 17, the current president of GlamourGal chapter at Commack High School in New York.

She has become one of the favorites of the seniors after fours years of volunteering.

“Sometimes they specifically requests for me,” Ramotar told NTD. “They’ll come back and they’ll be like, ‘Oh hey, how’s your family? How’s your brother?’ And I’ll be like, ‘Good! Did your daughter come?’"
Karen Dow was Doyle’s orchestra teacher 20 years ago. When GlamourGal’s advisor position became vacant, she didn’t think too much about it.

“I looked at it, I said, somebody else will take it, you know, I’m so busy,” she said.

But she felt it somehow followed her around.

“I thought, maybe it’s calling to me,” Dow said. “I lost my mother four years ago, and this was five years ago. And so this was my give back is that I miss my mother, I want to work with this generation.”

She said the program teaches students something they can use for their whole life.

“No matter what we teach, I feel like we should teach life skills and important things and good values,” she said.

*From NTD*