How one NYC Nonprofit Encourages Senior Citizens Through Conversation, Companionship, & Complimentary Beauty Makeovers

GlamourGals Foundation, Inc. is a New York-based Visit.org partner nonprofit that inspires conversation and companionship through complimentary beauty makeovers given by volunteers to seniors living in residential care. Volunteers provide seniors with a sense of dignity through personal attention, caring touch, and the opportunity to share their stories. In celebration of their twenty year anniversary, we interviewed Rachel Doyle, the founder and CEO of GlamourGals, to discuss the impact this organization has on the community, and how corporate teams can get involved.

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https://visit.org/blog/en/glamourgals-rachel-doyle/
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I founded GlamourGals 20 years ago. It was created in honor of my grandmother who had passed away in a senior home. I wanted to create something that I really enjoyed doing, and that would make someone smile.

In August of 1999, I thought about taking my passion for beauty and makeup, and using that interest to provide local seniors in care with a complimentary beauty makeover experience. I met with a local senior home activities director and she immediately asked, "Who's your corporate sponsor and who's the adult in charge?" At the time I was 17 and answered, "I'll get back to you." I left the meeting, walked out of the double doors of the senior home, hopped into my mom's minivan and said, "Well you're an adult, will you be the adult cosigning with me?"

To tackle the "corporate sponsor" question, by the way I had no idea what that meant and because this was 20 years ago, I opened up the yellow pages and started cold calling makeup companies to see if they would donate cosmetics. It was a couple months after that, in January of 2000, that we held our first GlamourGals makeover in Commack, New York.
Why did you choose to focus on the partnership between elderly people and teens?

60% of seniors in care do not receive visitors. What makes GlamourGals so unique is that we are addressing the issue of elder isolation by empowering teen volunteers to exercise their leadership abilities through these intergenerational connections. A quiet teen gains confidence to connect with others while a born leader can explore her capabilities through the familiarity of the ritual of choosing a lipstick, blush, or a nail polish color with someone else. As an organization, GG National supports those interactions with a structure and capacity for teen volunteers to be trained and reflect on these experiences and for the national team to respond to feedback, remain relevant and agile as a growing program and support those volunteers who need it.

How does GlamourGals benefit from being female-founded?

I think that young women, especially, need to see themselves in the leaders that are in front of them. As an organization, we’ve always wanted representation from a diverse group of females that are inspiring our volunteers. Because GlamourGals is female-run, we have the opportunity to reflect our diverse base of volunteers in the role models, the inspiring speakers we have at trainings, and the alumni we present to our young volunteers.

What are some unique aspects about connecting through beauty makeovers?

Two unique aspects about connecting through beauty makeovers is the element of choice and touch. Volunteering with seniors you may meet an individual who is hunched due to a stroke or illness, as a GG volunteer you take a moment to kneel down and look someone in the eyes and introduce yourself and ask them what color lipstick would you like. That interaction is powerful. You are not only eye to eye with someone but you are introducing "choice" into a routine that is most likely devoid of it.

The presence of touch at a GlamourGals makeover is critical and unique. In addition to the makeover process of cleansing a face or offering a hand massage before painting nails many makeovers end with an embrace or squeeze of a hand. It has been studied that human touch has a number of positive side effects on the health of people including boosting an immune system and reducing a feeling of isolation.

What has your impact been on both volunteers and the elderly participants?

I think the impact that an organization is making is twofold.

For the seniors, it is measured one way through our mid-year senior survey. We reach out to the senior centers we work with and get feedback about the program. This year’s survey, still ongoing has already yielded for the 3rd year in a row 100% positive feedback.

We also strive to create a program that is meaningful for teen volunteers. We provide an opportunity for students to reflect through an online journaling system, log their hours for recommendation letters, scholarship opportunities and recognition.

Right now, a really hot topic is the extreme isolation that people are experiencing, and the depression that comes with that. Young people experience isolation because of technology, and seniors experience physical isolation given their living situations. Our program
is actively breaking down barriers and connecting those two in a very direct, actionable way.

**How does someone become a volunteer?**

Our volunteer chapters are organized in high schools and colleges around the country. The best first way is to hit our IG at @GlamourGals (and mine @ggfounder) or our website GlamourGals.org, and click on start a chapter. It outlines the basics you need before getting in touch with our program office.

We work with a pipeline of chapters. Volunteer groups become an official chapter when they schedule their first makeover. We facilitate this by supporting them with their first call to the senior home to make sure they have all the materials they need to execute their service.

**Do you have experiences for corporate groups?**

Absolutely. We are always excited to team up with corporate groups and we do that through our Mega Makeover programming.

I think a lot of companies are having a shift in how they view company culture. The idea of bringing people together for something meaningful is a priority for them. Companies have even engaged their clients in this non-traditional setting or used it as an internal team building activity. In some cases we are able to pair these groups with senior homes that have reached out for a teen volunteer chapter but do not have a school close by.

If volunteering was easy, everybody would do it. There’s always a challenge, there’s your own fears and hang-ups that you bring to an experience. With the supportive and group setting of a GlamourGals makeover you are given the chance to overcome those personal challenges, fears, or even stereotypes — it’s a really powerful thing to do.

If you or your team would want to get involved with GlamourGals Foundation, book an experience on Visit.org. Outside of volunteering, you may opt to be a corporate sponsor for the organization's Illuminate Dinner in May 2020.

*Photos & video courtesy of GlamourGals*