

# A Prom to Remember

THE YWCA OF NORTH ORANGE COUNTY'S PROMPOSAL IS A DREAM COME TRUE

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Many high school girls dream about the perfect prom, but some don't have the luxury of spending hundreds of dollars on dresses, shoes, hair and makeup. For 16-year-old Perla Gomez, who had only been living in America for less than a year, a true prom experience seemed out of reach. But when she signed up to volunteer for the YWCA of North Orange County, her newfound life received all the glitz and glam for one very special day.

In 2007, CEO of the YWCA of North Orange County Diane Masseth-Jones created the Prom Project to provide new and gently-used dresses for girls who come from low-income families. On a specific spring date, 25 girls are chosen as recipients of Boutique Day; they get to pick out their dresses, have their hair and makeup done by professionals, and dance, eat, drink and socialize like any other prom.

Gomez had many dreams—study hard in school and get a job to help her dad—but going to prom was one she didn't expect to come true. When she heard about the project from Masseth-Jones and Chairman Rosamaria Gomez-Amaro as a volunteer, she applied and was chosen as a recipient.

Boutique Day for Gomez was fun, but she couldn't help but freak out a little with all of the dress options. "I came to get my dress but it was really hard because I looked at a lot of dresses and was like [gasp], 'Oh my god!'" Gomez recalled.

The dress she ended up choosing was a bright orange quinceañera gown. Throughout the day, Gomez enjoyed every aspect. She couldn't help but compare the dance party to the ones back home in Mexico.

That being said, she passed along word about the Prom Project to her relatives. "I have my two cousins; they don't have a lot of opportunities, so they decided it would be a really good opportunity for them because they can't have parties like this."

The YWCA of North Orange County still means a lot to Gomez. To her, they're an organization of opportunities. "They [taught] me a lot of things—I learned more English because when I came, I didn't speak any English and I tried to speak. They helped me."

Prom goes beyond borders, and for Gomez, she transformed into a more beautiful, stronger version of herself that would echo in other young girls like her. ■



## To All the Boys

• Prom Boutique Day has since only gathered gowns for the chosen girls, but the nonprofit organization is now considering branching out with suits for the boys. It's not a prom without a date!

## Shop 'Til You Drop

• The Prom Project volunteers become "personal shoppers" for the girls. They help them choose a dress and suggest how to get their hair and makeup done.

## Sharing in Confidence

• The YWCA of North Orange County reaches out to over 250 high school counselors across all of Orange County to get the word out about the Prom Project. Counselors discreetly pass on the information to girls who might be embarrassed about revealing their socioeconomic status.

Photoshoot Location:  
**YWCA OF NORTH ORANGE COUNTY**  
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