



The Fashion Experience

written by Linda Osborne, Chairperson

A couple of years ago I walked through the doors of Ophelia's Place for personal help. What I didn't realize at the time is that I would become a part of something bigger than I could even have imagined. Upon meeting Danny and Mary Ellen Clausen I soon realized the true meaning of giving, sacrifice and how creative you need to be when running a non-for-profit organization. Two years ago one of their ideas of having a fashion show came to fruition. Now fashion shows and eating disorders usually walk down the runway hand in hand so the challenge became how do we have a fashion show and dissolve all the stigma that goes along with it.

A group of talented people met one afternoon to brainstorm. We pooled all of our ideas and resources. Among one of these talents is a woman named Anne Marie Stonecypher, owner of AMS Models(www.amsmodels.com) She is a pioneer in her field. She believes that confidence and beauty is from the neck up. She believes that the size of your body does not dictate whether or not you can walk down her runways. We are truly blessed to have this woman as a major part of our "Revolutionizing the Runway" event.

Since nothing like this was ever done before and we had no blueprint to follow, we had to create something spectacular on just an idea. When you have so many good people willing to devote their time you get more than the vision in your head. Our first show, held at the Liverpool Community Church and hosted by EMME was a great success and we now had our blueprint. It was a combination of AMS professional models and people who are in some way affiliated with Ophelia's Place. Ann Marie took men, women and children who had never walked a runway before down a journey they would never forget. The energy was unbelievable. The women from Ophelia's Place courageously put their fears aside and walked with a confidence that I had not seen in them before. This is what happens when you associate with people who believe you can.

February 8, 2009 was our second annual fashion show. We were blessed once again to have a new host for our show, Julie Abbott, who again believes that beauty is not size bound. Of course, since we had one show under our belt we wanted to make this one even more spectacular. That is what happens when you get a group of creative people together and you give them coffee and cookies. We opened the show with a special message from EMME and African dancing with Biboti Ouikahilo and his dance students from Wacheva Cultural Arts Center. We were blessed to have sponsors who allowed us to showcase their apparel and for that we are truly thankful. The combination of young children, girl scouts, men and women, young and old was amazing. The women from Ophelia's Place had somehow changed. The heads were held a little bit higher, their confidence shined through with every step. Their courage once again made me proud to be a part of this show and to know these beautiful women.

I hope the world changes the way we view fashion. It should not be about how to diminish the way women look in order to sell the clothes, but rather about encouraging the confidence you see when they walk down the runway. We are not bound by our color. We are not bound by our age. We are not bound by our bodies and we are not bound by our size. No longer can anyone say, at least not on our stage, that they are not right to walk the runway. You are just right. You are real. You are fashion. You are beauty.....come walk down our runway and enjoy the true fashion experience.

...i will take refuge in the shadow of your wings...psalm 57

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