

Cancer Support Community Hosts Seventh Annual Teen Prom

Written by Taylor Seely

Wednesday, 30 March 2016 14:58 - Last Updated Wednesday, 30 March 2016 15:06



Ellie Yar and Braden Waymire at the 2015 Cancer Support Community Prom: An Evening in Emerald City

She exits the charter bus at a seemingly small Downtown Phoenix home outfitted in a gown fit for a princess and widens her eyes trying to recognize the three adjacent rooms she's visited so many times before. Nearly two dozen young men and women dressed similarly behind her are also astonished at the transformation. What was once the modest dining area is now a ruby red haven with fruit-infused punch, spaghetti and lasagna and tables topped with wedding-style centerpieces. The spacious room with nothing but a few couches is now draped in curtains and looks like a scene from the Wizard of Oz, which is fitting, considering the night's theme is An Evening in Emerald City.

It's not long before everyone's making conversation and dancing their tails off, but she has sweat beads dripping from her beautiful—but fake—hair, and she can't handle it. To everyone's amazement, she rips the wig off, exposes her bald head, and continues smiling and dancing. No one makes a big fuss—after all it's prom night at the Cancer Support Community. Bald heads are hardly a big deal, but for the nonprofit staff who worked endlessly to disguise “the cancer place” and create a wildly-fun and safe atmosphere, complete with a yellow brick road entrance, it meant the goal was achieved.

Emilie Jarboe is the youth and teen program coordinator at the Cancer Support Community, a 501c3 nonprofit organization that hosts monthly support group meet-ups and activities for teens who've been diagnosed with cancer or have been impacted by it through a loved one. As the only organization providing year-round support for teenagers specifically, the Cancer Support Community's prom event has been quite a hit, with 2016 marking its seventh year. This year's theme is inspired by the beloved Alice in Wonderland: An Evening in Wonderland. Jarboe, who's been to four of the proms and helped plan three, said prom night is all about giving the teens some independence and a night off from thinking about cancer.

“Teens are a special subset of life where they're not children anymore, and they're...working on establishing independence from their parents,” Jarboe says. The broader teen program is a special niche where teens can come connect with others of their own age and build supportive relationships with those going through similar hardships.

Braden Waymire and Ellie Yar, two 14-year-olds who attended the Emerald City-themed prom last year, are anxiously awaiting this year's surprise event. Waymire's in the midst of a Ganglioglioma diagnosis, tumors in his central nervous system, while Yar has been in remission for two years but will never be considered “cancer free.” She was diagnosed with grade two ependymoma in the four ventricle, which has a tendency to come back 10 to 20 years later.

“Dress day is my favorite,” Yar says recounting last year's experience. “That's the day you go to the Cinderella Affair and pick out a dress that you can wear to prom, and it's free, and you get to pick out shoes and accessories (too)!”

For Waymire, he'll receive a free rental tuxedo from one of the companies the Cancer Support Community partners with.

The day of the event, the prom attendees receive a pure luxury treatment, with hair and makeup done by professionals at Toni & Guy, and while parents aren't invited to attend the special night, both Waymire and Yar's moms have put in time in advance to help with the decorations and smooth sailing of the event.

“There's really nothing else out there for teens,” Yar's mom, Claire, says. “(This program) been a really hugely crucial support system for her and for us. We love it!”

While the event's been highly successful among Cancer Support Community members and prom attendees, Jarboe says the biggest issue is spreading the message. The year's prom, April 2, 2016, is open to any and all teens affected by cancer, and the organization wants to accommodate as many teens as possible.

For more information on the event, visit the Cancer Support Community's [website](#).

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The 2015 Cancer Support Community Teen Prom: An Evening in Emerald City



The Cancer Support Community Building in Downtown Phoenix