Led by three sophomores, the Augustana Women’s Association (AWA) collected dresses for the Cheyenne River Youth Project’s “Passion for Fashion” event, an annual event in Eagle Butte, S.D., that provides teenage girls in need with prom essentials such as dresses, shoes and make-up.
Sophomores Rachel Saum, Mallory Schulte and Sara Kohles, along with the dresses they collected.
S
ome are long, some are short. Some are chiffon; some velvet. Puffy skirts, long skirts, short skirts; polka dots, sparkles, florals and even leopard print – there are some of each.

At last count, the Augustana Women’s Association (AWA) had collected 56 dresses for the Cheyenne River Youth Project’s “Passion for Fashion” event, an annual event in Eagle Butte, S.D., that provides teenage girls in need with prom essentials such as dresses, shoes and make-up. At the same time, the event promotes female friendships, the importance of positive self-esteem and appreciation for body image.

Led by sophomore co-chairs Mallory Schulte (Yankton, S.D.), Sara Kohles (Crofton, Neb.) and Rachel Saum (Luverne, Minn.), AWA began collecting dresses in February. Schulte, Kohles and Saum, along with AWA Advisor Dr. Darcie Rives East, assistant professor of English, and Karla Abbott, instructor of Nursing, delivered the dresses to Eagle Butte’s Cokata Wiconi Teen Center on Friday, March 9.

On Saturday, March 10, the Teen Center had been transformed to feature a “Parisian cafe” and boutiques and shops found in downtown London, including locations for manicures, pedicures, facials, make-overs and hair-styling.

Officials from the Cheyenne River Youth Project (CRYP) welcomed a record number of girls for the “Passion for Fashion” event, designed after the fashion industry’s “Fashion Week.” According to the CRYP, the event served 44 teen girls in 2009; 57 in 2010 and more than 80 last year.

Schulte, a government major, says the chance to see the dresses go to teen girls in need firsthand was inspiring.

Kohles agrees.

“It’s so exciting to know we’re helping people right here in South Dakota. Obviously there are needs all over the world but, it’s also important to look in our own back yard to see how we can help.”

Rives East says the project illustrates the necessity for women to help other women across racial, class, and sexual lines.

“This work helps the Augie community build bridges of communication and assistance to other communities and cultures here in South Dakota. The goal here is to educate and involve Augie students in helping create a more just and equitable South Dakota,” she said.

As an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Abbott says she’s excited to be part of the event that gives back to teens who may not otherwise experience the excitement of prom.

“I am happy to be the link to such a wonderful project that was so appreciated by the Cheyenne River Youth Project! Without the Passion for Fashion program, girls on my reservation drive sometimes 300 miles to buy a prom dress. Now they do not have to leave their reservation to find something to wear to an event so very important to them,” Abbott said.

“‘It’s so exciting to know we’re helping people right here in South Dakota.’”

– Mallory Schulte, Class of 2014