

Seven Salon Spa treats special guests to day of priming and pampering



Mark Johnson, co-owner of Seven Spa in Stockbridge, styles the hair of a child under DCF care, Monday Dec. 22, 2014. Ben Garver — The Berkshire Eagle

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Editor's note: In cooperation with the request of the DCF, the full names and faces of the children involved in this story have been withheld for their protection and privacy.

STOCKBRIDGE >> When Amanda arrived at Seven Salon Spa on Monday morning,

she was swiftly whisked away into the chair of stylist Collette Viletto.

The 14-year-old was unsure what to expect.

As Viletto snipped and combed, Amanda kept glancing at her reflection in the wide, full-length mirror.

"Where I live, it's in the middle of nowhere, so I don't get out much," Amanda said.

Amanda was among seven girls in care of the state Department of Children & Families invited on Monday to take part in special spa day to celebrate the holidays. Most of the girls said they had never had a real salon experience before.

Viletto finished and Amanda took another, longer look in the mirror at her soft, neatly smoothed golden brown hair.

"You feel pretty?" the stylist asked. The teenager nodded yes, smiling brightly.

"You look beautiful," Viletto said.



Seven Salon Spa stylist Sonya Heimann on Monday flat irons the hair of a young girl as part of a surprise holiday spa day offered to a group of local girls who are in the care of the state Department of Children & Families. (Ben Garver -- Berkshire Eagle)

Asked what she thought of her new look, Amanda said, "I like it."

"It's nice for anybody to have specific time for themselves, and maybe to be spoiled rotten a little bit," the young lady said with a giggle.

That was exactly the goal of the day, said Maurice Peterson, who co-owns the salon and spa with Mark Johnson.

The idea of doing something special for the girls was the idea of stylist Sonya Heimann and her friend, Nicole McElroy, who is a social worker with DCF.

"For the past few years, I've just felt Christmas has just been about commercialism ... I became a total Scrooge," Peterson said. He said he didn't hesitate to greenlight the girls' spa day when the idea came up.

About a dozen staff members provided Monday's manicures, haircuts and makeup applications for the girls, and served them lunch provided by The Red Lion Inn.

In return, the girls expressed their gratitude with smile, laughter, polite 'thank-yous' and big hugs.

"I'm so grateful for everyone who's helped out. I'm overwhelmed," Peterson said. "This has really rescued Christmas for me."

In response to a single email he sent out to clients seeking holiday gifts to surprise the girls with, salon staff took in dozens of gifts, donated makeup from Jane Iredale, who owns a cosmetics business in Great Barrington, jewelry from Berkshire Lia Sophia representative Stacey Oates. A total of nine oversized gift bags were given to the seven girls, ages 7 to 16, who visited, plus two others who were invited but unable to attend.

Alannah Rainey, a 12-year-old spa client from New York state, was on hand as part of a public school "Pay it Forward Project." She picked out books she had read featuring strong, inspirational female characters, to donate for the gift bags. With each book, she

wrote a personal message to the recipient.

To a girl named Kylie, Rainey gave a copy of Marissa Burt's book "Storybound," and in a note wrote: "This book has really inspired me to stand up for myself and be strong. I hope it does the same for you. Happy Holidays."

McElroy said the girls come from all different backgrounds. Some are staying with other family members, some are in foster care, some will hopefully be reunited with their parents, while others will hopefully be adopted by a new forever family.



Maurice Peterson is co-owner of Seven Salon Spa in Stockbridge. (Ben Garver -- Berkshire Eagle)

She said when a child is separated from home, "there can be a lot of negative feelings, with kids blaming themselves or trying to figure out what they did wrong, when the situation has nothing to do about that."

Though DCF sponsors things like annual holiday parties and distributes holiday gifts, McElroy said it can mean something a little more for a child to have one-on-one attention and to be listened to and cared for.

Peterson said he hopes other people, particularly other salons and spas, will be inspired to share their services around other milestone events, like prom time.

Interim DCF Commissioner Erin Deveney, who caught wind of the good deed, contacted The Eagle on Monday. In addition to expressing her gratitude to the salon, she said, "this is just one example of how people can get involved. We welcome anyone who is interested to contact the department and find out how they can help support our children and youth."

"Anytime you can give these kids positive feedback is so helpful," McElroy said. "For them to know they have community support is so important."

To learn more about opportunities to support DCF youth, visit www.mass.gov/dcf for a directory of phone numbers for regional offices.