

Teen childhood cancer survivor goes bald again in solidarity with other patients

The TLDR: Wilson Wu was teased over his bald head in kindergarten as he underwent chemotherapy. Now, the 18-year-old cancer survivor has shaved his head to show his support for children with cancer at Hair for Hope 2026.



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SINGAPORE – As a five-year-old battling cancer, Wilson Wu braced himself for kindergarten every day.

The other children ridiculed him for being bald and called him

names.

Now 18 and a cancer survivor, he has gone bald again – not because of chemotherapy, but to stand in solidarity with others battling cancer.

On April 19, Wilson shaved his head in support of Hair for Hope (HfH) 2026, which aims to raise awareness of childhood cancer and raise \$5 million for programmes and services that the Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF) provides to such children and their families.

Running from March 4 to Aug 16, the campaign also sees "shavees" volunteer to go bald in support of children with cancer, showing them it is okay to be bald.

Recalling his own fight against cancer, Wilson said he started experiencing random bouts of pain in his chest when he was three, which left him wailing and unable to sleep at night. Initially, his parents and doctors thought it might just be a common disease like the flu.

But in 2013, at age five, he was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a rare and aggressive cancer that develops from immature nerve cells in infants and young children.

"I was very young, so I didn't really understand what was happening. I remember feeling scared and confused, especially seeing my parents being very worried and emotional," said Wilson, now a student at Hwa Chong Institution.

The condition affected his spine and impeded his ability to move about freely. He had no appetite and became very skinny.

He also had to shave his head after chemotherapy caused his hair to fall out.

This sudden change took a toll on his mental health and social interactions as well. "It affected my confidence and ability to make

friends, as it made me more self-conscious," he said.

"I definitely felt like I was treated differently. Kids didn't really understand what was going on, so they would call me names and call me bald," he said.

"It was a little bit hurtful, but now that I think back about it, it's okay, because they were just kids who didn't really understand."

His treatments were complicated and painful, ranging from CT and MRI scans, to bone marrow tests which "felt like a hole puncher" going through his spine.

Eventually, the treatments became more intensive, and he had to withdraw from kindergarten to be hospitalised throughout the treatments for more than a year. "My life revolved around the hospital, and I rarely got to see the outside," he said.

His only sense of the world beyond the hospital walls was the different food, such as home-cooked dishes, that his parents brought him.

During this period, CCF stepped in with emotional support and social opportunities, organising activities at the hospital resource centre and playrooms, where young Wilson could make friends with his ward mates and other cancer patients.

After a two-year battle against cancer, he had his final operation at seven and has been in remission since.



Wilson Wu (right) was diagnosed with neuroblastoma at age five and underwent countless hospital treatments. He is pictured here with his father, Mr Wu Tze Sien.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF WU TZE SIEN

When he enrolled in Primary 1, he was afraid to approach people. "My main goal was to survive primary school without getting bullied," Wilson recalled ruefully.

Along the way, however, he met friends in school who showed him support. They wrote him letters and passed him gifts when he had to go for check-ups, and empathised with his weaker physical health – he did not perform as well as others in PE, for instance – due to the chemotherapy.

Though the treatments were successful, they still left him with side effects. For instance, his metabolism is affected, which in turn impacts his physique for climbing, a sport he is active in.

“I find it very hard to gain muscle. I can eat a lot of protein and work out, but I don’t really see very fast improvement,” he said.

Wilson was introduced to climbing at age five by his father, an avid climber, but stopped two months later when he was diagnosed with cancer. He returned to the sport in Secondary 1, and also takes part in activities such as hiking and kayaking through his co-curricular activity, the Outdoor Education Students’ Club.

“But this experience with cancer shaped how I view challenges in life, and made me more resilient. So whenever I face a challenge now, it’s light work compared with what I once faced.”



Wilson Wu (seated) and his father, Mr Wu Tze Sien, at the launch of Hair for Hope 2026.

PHOTO: CHILDREN’S CANCER FOUNDATION

Wilson added that he was grateful for his parents. “My parents took a lot of leave to spend time with me and make sure I was well taken care of. I think it affected my mum’s career (opportunities) too,” he said.

His father, a HfH ambassador this year, has shaved his head for HfH since 2008.

It is Wilson's fourth year participating in the campaign, and having his head shaved on stage by his father made the event more special for him.

"He was always there for me (since) the start, so it was a sweet moment," Wilson said.

- Hair for Hope 2026's main head-shaving event is at VivoCity on July 25 from 11am to 7pm, and on July 26 from 11am to 6pm. For more information, go to <https://hairforhope.org.sg>
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