

The courage to go bald: Why more girls are shaving their heads for children with cancer

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Yishun Innova Junior College student Gerlyn Ng was the only female student from the school to shave her hair off during the recent Hair for Hope event on July 1. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM



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SINGAPORE – Walking into the foyer of Yishun Innova Junior College on July 1, Gerlyn Ng was met with cheers and loud applause from her schoolmates.

She was not receiving an award. The 18-year-old was about to have her long, black hair shaved off in a show of support for children battling cancer, and was the only female in her school to do so that day.

“I was very nervous. But the whole thing took only about three minutes,” she said.

She is one of a growing number of females joining the annual Hair for Hope campaign by the Children’s Cancer Foundation (CCF) to raise awareness of childhood cancer and funds for the cause. People go bald in solidarity with young patients, showing them it is okay to lose one’s hair.

The 2026 edition, which runs from March 4 to Aug 16, aims to raise \$5 million for programmes and services that the foundation provides to children who have cancer and their families.

Immediately after, Gerlyn headed straight for a mirror in the nearest toilet to take in her new look. She had been preparing herself by using TikTok filters to imagine herself bald. The reality, she found, was far better.

“I realised it’s not such a big deal. More people do look at me in public... but shorter hair is more convenient, more cooling. And my daily life still continues; it has not changed,” she said.

She was drawn to the cause when she heard about the event.

She sought courage from her friends to break the news to her family, thinking that her parents would object, as she had never worn her hair above her shoulders. Instead, after she explained why she wanted to do it, they encouraged her.

“Even my three brothers, who thought I was crazy at first,” said Gerlyn, the second oldest of four children.



Gerlyn Ng with her parents and three brothers, before and after she shaved her hair off.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF GERLYN NG

A female schoolmate tried to discourage her, saying that she could not imagine Gerlyn without her hair.

“I understand why she felt that way. There is a stigma that girls look nicer with longer hair or that it is a big part of their identity,” she said.

Looking back, Gerlyn has no regrets and encourages more girls to take the leap for a good cause. As at July 27, she has raised \$1,570 through donations for shaving her hair off, and hopes this sum will grow before donations close on Aug 16.

“I know girls worry about how they look bald, but it’s not that bad. It’s kind of cute,” she said.

The CCF partners about nine to 12 schools yearly to hold Hair for Hope satellite events. In 2026, nine co-educational schools took part. These included Hwa Chong Institution, Holy Innocents’ Primary School, Nexus International School and Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Among the 448 students who took part at these school events, 19 were girls. In the past four years, between 15 and 30 female students have shaved their hair off each year in schools.

Kevin Tay, an oncologist and chairman of CCF, said the growing number of girls taking part reflects changing social attitudes.



Primary 3 pupil Joy Ang, nine, having her hair shaved off at Kong Hwa School's Hair for Hope event on May 22. PHOTO: ANTZ LEE

“Being bald is becoming less of a taboo... More people have family or friends affected by cancer, so there is greater understanding and acceptance of what patients go through,” he said.

Hair for Hope began in 2003 as a grassroots initiative by CCF volunteers to support children returning to school after cancer treatment, when hair loss often made them feel self-conscious, said Tay. The campaign aimed to reduce stigma by encouraging healthy individuals to [shave their heads in solidarity](#).

Years of public education have helped normalise the gesture, he said. Females now account for about one in five participants nationwide, with their numbers rising steadily in recent years – from 620 in 2023 to 943 in 2025.

Schools have become important partners in imparting empathy and compassion, he said.

Among 2026's participants was Primary 3 pupil Joy Ang. She was one of six primary school girls from Kong Hwa School who offered their locks for the cause.

Joy's father, Kelvin Ang, 44, was diagnosed with stage three nose cancer in 2017. He has relapsed three times, and is not in remission yet, though he has been cancer-free for the last four years.

“In a certain way, she understands what a cancer patient goes through. After chemotherapy, along with my hair, my eyebrows disappeared too,” said Ang, who works as a remisier.

The first time Joy shaved her hair off was in Primary 1, together with her twin brother and mother.



Antz Lee, 43, with her twins Jay Ang (right) and Joy Ang (left) before and after taking part in

Her mother Antz Lee, 43, an accounts manager, said she had coaxed Joy to join her and her son to shave off their hair in 2024.

Said Lee: "I told her that people shave their heads to share an identity with cancer patients like her father, so that they do not feel alone."

The experience gave Joy a glimpse of what female cancer patients go through when they lose their hair.

People occasionally mistook her for a boy, even when she was wearing a skirt, or questioned why she was entering the female restroom.

She learnt over time not to let such comments affect her.



Joy Ang, nine, with her father Kelvin Ang, 44, and her twin brother Jay Ang having their hair shaved off at Kong Hwa School's Hair for Hope event on May 22. PHOTO: ANTZ LEE

"Sometimes people laughed at me, but it happened so many times that I just got used to it," she said.

In 2026, she volunteered to shave her hair off again without hesitation. Her father and twin brother joined her.