Hair for Hope aims to raise $1.5m for kids with cancer in virtual comeback

No public head-shaving events this year so participants have to get own haircut; donations to take place online

Having their heads shaven yesterday as part of the launch of this year's Hair for Hope campaign were (from left) Madam Thangavelu Latha, Terry Goh, a cancer survivor, and Mr Pua Luck Kheng. The campaign is back after taking a break last year due to Covid-19. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

Prisca Ang

Assistant microbiologist Thangavelu Latha has not kept her hair long since her son was diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma in 2019.

She and her husband have been shaving their heads to show 14-year-old Ron, who has completed treatment for the cancer in his lungs, that being bald is nothing to be ashamed of.
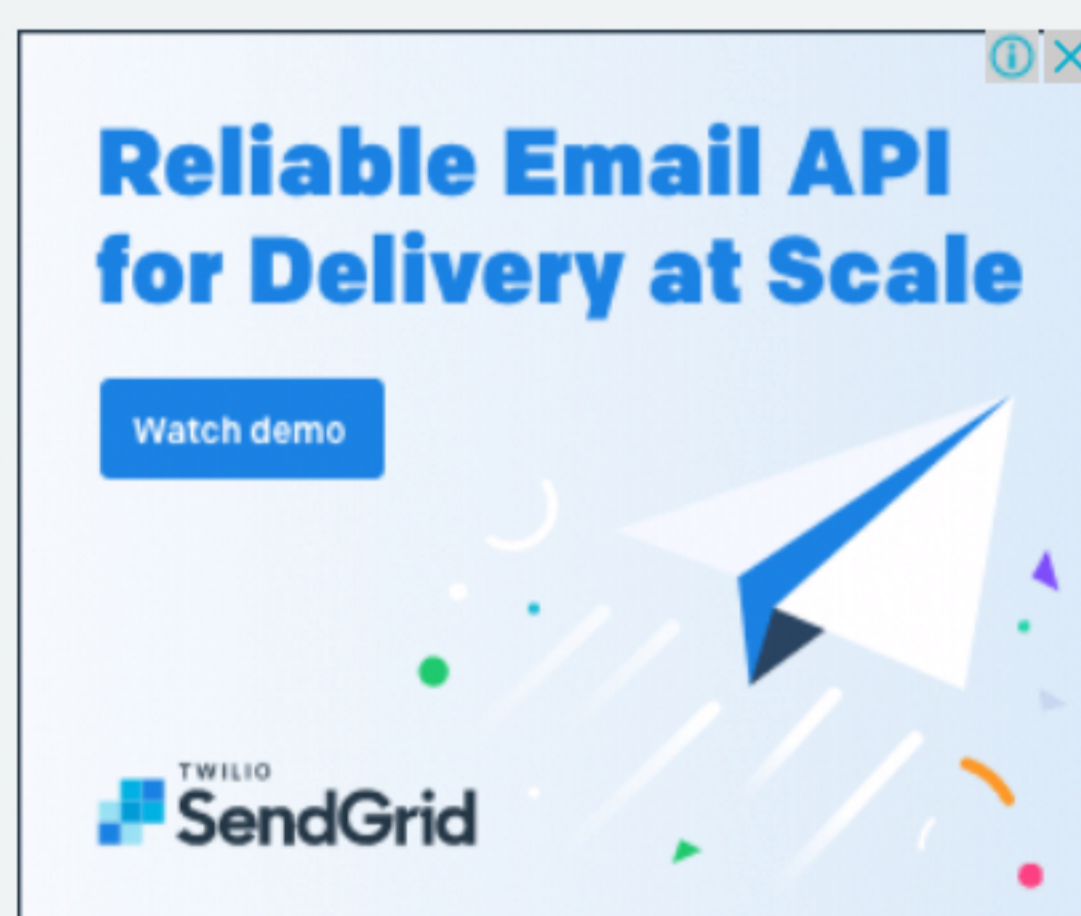
"When my son found out he had cancer, he wanted to keep his hair until the last strand. So we shaved first, and after that he agreed to do so," said Madam Latha, 42.

She is among several participants who helped to launch this year's Hair for Hope campaign yesterday by going bald.

The annual fund-raiser of the Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF) is taking place in a virtual format for the first time in its 18-year history. It took a break last year because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It aims to raise $1.5 million this year to help children with cancer, as well as their families, by getting 1,500 people to shave their heads, raise awareness and bring in donations.

In a more normal year, the event can draw more than 5,000 participants and cover about 40 per cent of CCF's total expenses. In 2019, it raised a record $4.78 million.

There will be no public head-shaving events this year, so Hair for Hope participants across all categories have to make their own arrangements to shave their heads.

They can also visit 11 Hair for Hope partner salons to do so, and enjoy a 20 per cent discount.

Donations to CCF will also take place online. The campaign runs until June 30, with some activities live-streamed on social media.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

> **When my son found out he had cancer, he wanted to keep his hair until the last strand. So we shaved first, and after that he agreed to do so.**
>
> MADAM THANGAVELU LATHA, 42, an assistant microbiologist whose son Ron, now 14, was diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma in 2019. She is among several participants who helped to launch this year's Hair for Hope campaign yesterday by going bald.

More than 150 children and young adults are diagnosed with cancer each year in Singapore.

CCF chairman Ho Cheng Huat said at the Hair for Hope launch: "When children lose their hair, some get laughed at, some receive bullying remarks simply because they look different. Such actions affect their self-esteem... Everyone who shaves shows support."

Terry Goh, 12, parted with his hair at yesterday's event at the Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery. He was diagnosed with Burkitt lymphoma when he was seven and is now in remission.

"I want to help people who have cancer to not be afraid of being laughed at by others," said the Tao Nan School pupil.

Going bald with Terry at the event were Madam Latha and the monastery's unit manager Pua Luck Kheng, 49.

CCF has supported beneficiaries like Terry and Ron through initiatives such as counselling, financial assistance and lessons at its Place for Academic Learning and Support to help them catch up with their schoolwork.

Said Transport Minister Ong Ye Kung, who, as the guest of honour, shaved Terry's head: "I cannot imagine what the children are going through and how they feel.

"All I can say is that they are so brave, and I admire their resilience and courage. We can all do our part - big or small - to show our support for them."

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