



Feature

## Hair for Hope 2023: Youths shave heads to support children with cancer

Hair for Hope 2023 celebrates milestone of 70,000 shaven heads, as brave youths come together to show their peers that being bald is okay.

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It's a distant memory now, but in primary school, I remember a flyer with three words flash boldly on its cover.

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bald is normal for those who are battling cancer.

As a teenager, hair is an important part of my identity. It's a form of self-expression and to go bald as a statement? I have to admit, that's a big step for me.

I was curious to find out if other youths felt the same way, so I attended a HfH event at Montfort Secondary School recently.



*Montfort Secondary School teacher Mr Chin participating with his students. Image source: Children's Cancer Foundation*

### **Shaving their hair for cancer awareness**

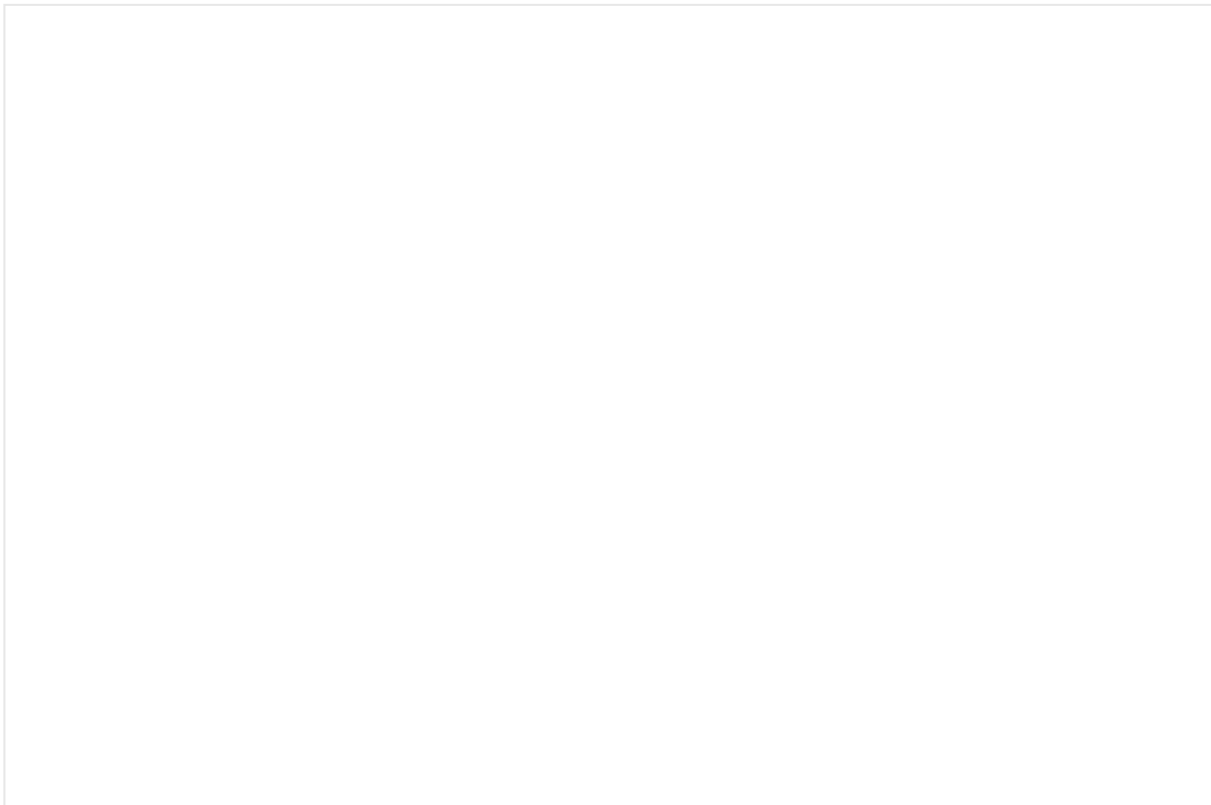
It was 11:30 am when I arrived. Students chattering in the assembly hall quietened down when the first batch of shavees draped on the barber sheets.

I watched in trepidation, picturing myself in their shoes. The buzzing of blades in front of an audience was unnerving.

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students at the all-boys secondary school.

“No, it’s his second, and my third time,” Jessica laughed when I asked if this was their first time shaving for cancer awareness.



*Alex and his mother Jessica participating together for the second time. Image source: Children’s Cancer Foundation*

It all started when Jessica first decided to shave for cancer 10 years ago. Since then, Alex and Jessica’s husband (who preferred not to be named) have also joined in.

Jessica first started shaving when some relatives started losing hair after undergoing chemotherapy for cancer. Losing hair is a common side effect of chemotherapy, which is why CCF hopes to remove the stigma through its HfH campaign.

“Some of my family members have passed away because of cancer. I just want to make more people aware, especially children, that it’s okay to lose their hair,” Jessica tells The Pride.

Inspired by his mum, Alex participated in HfH in primary school. He said: “(Losing my hair) doesn’t bother me much because it’s just hair. It’s the fight against cancer that matters.”



*First-time shavees Krishkarthic and his father, Karthic. Image source: Jayden Tan*

Unlike Alex and Jessica, other students and their parents were first-time shavees.

I met 16-year-old Krishkarthic Neelarajan and his dad Karthic, 45, who were participating for the first time.

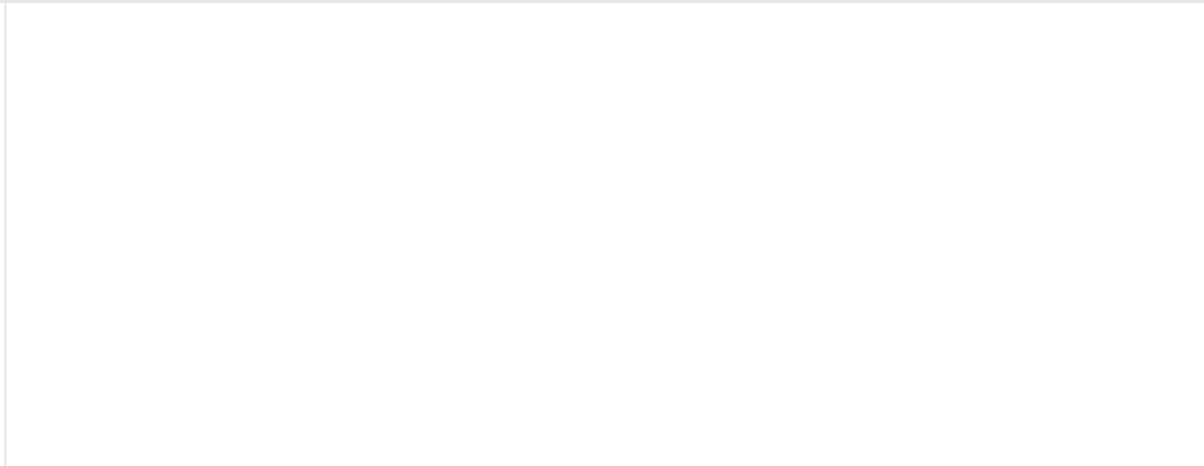
“My son told me that he wanted to donate his hair. I was happy for that, and I want to support him, so I’d thought I would join him,” Karthic said smiling, “I was very proud of him for taking such a big step at his age.”

Added Krishkarthic: “At first, I was nervous because losing my hair is a big change, but my friends are here so I don’t feel alone.”

“I decided to do this after watching YouTube clips on cancer awareness. And honestly, it was my last year in school, so I thought why not?”

Thinking back to when I was 16, I remember the pressure of trying to fit in. So the support of friends makes this a little less scary.

### **Teachers join in too**



*Mr Chin and his students (from far left) Royston, Umayr, and Santosh. Image source: Children's Cancer Foundation*

Parents and children weren't the only ones losing their hair for cancer: Teachers were chipping in too.

I met Mr Chin Jia Le, a Chinese language teacher who has been overseeing HfH events at Montfort Secondary since 2018.

He was with three Sec 3 students — Santosh, Royston, and Umayr — who laughed when they said going back for lessons bald would be the talk of the class for a while.

Taking the opportunity, Mr Chin explained to his students that the attention can be put into good use: "When other people like your classmates see you bald, they will ask why... so it's a chance for us to share and encourage them as well."

Royston joked: "And it's more cooling to be bald too!"

### **HfH's kick off event**



*Participants at HfH's kick-off event with Jetstar Asia CEO Barathan Pasupathi (third from the right). Image source: Jayden Tan*

The session at Montfort reminded me of the HfH's kick-off event at Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery on Apr 30, where CCF celebrated its 20th anniversary with a milestone of 70,000 shaven heads over the years.

Among the 300 shavees was Jetstar Asia CEO Barathan Pasupathi, who is on CCF's board of directors.

He told The Pride: "Two years ago, my wife's liver failed... she lost her hair. Today, she's much better and we received a lot of support from the community and everyone around us."

Although most were adults, among the shavees were Xavier Ang, 22 and Eron, 19.



*Xavier (left) and younger brother, Eron (right). Image source: Jayden Tan*

Xavier said: "I'm graduating from poly this year and I decided to shave before my graduation so that I can share the message with my classmates."

He is a five-time shavee who first participated at 16. His decision was inspired by his secondary school teacher who has been actively supporting HfH for the past five years.

In turn, Eron decided to participate because he was inspired by his brother.

He said: "I thought it was something very brave after seeing (Xavier) shave his head, and I thought it was something I could do as well."

"I have friends that went to shave after I did, so I feel that it's quite a powerful statement."

Talking to so many young people and witnessing their transformation was an eye-opening experience for me. I learned that it's more than the action itself of shaving, but rather, it serves as a powerful visual reminder that can reach out to many people.

HfH will be concluding this year's campaign with a two-day event on July 29 and 30 at VivoCity with guest of honour Minister for Health Ong Ye Kung. It will be happening from 11am to 7pm on Saturday and 11am to 6pm on Sunday.

More details are available on their website. Click [here](#) to register and find out more!

If you are interested in participating, you can also sign up on the event day at Vivocity, Amphitheatre, level 3. There will also be a public exhibition at level 1, so even if you're not

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