Cancer survivor pays it forward

Brain cancer has not stopped 10-year-old Jordan Tan. Now in remission, he shares with **Elaine Samboo** why he became a Hair for Hope ambassador.

Jordan (centre) with his parents and younger siblings after shaving his head at the Hair for Hope event earlier this year. **PHOTO: CHILDREN'S CANCER FOUNDATION**

PUPILS OF Red Swastika School may have seen Jordan Tan, 10, sporting a shiny bald head recently.

Despite suffering from a long-term chronic disease and surviving cancer last year, the Primary 4 pupil stepped forward to volunteer as a Hair for Hope ambassador this year.

It all started in April 2021, when, at just age seven, he was diagnosed with diabetes insipidus.

It is a rare condition which upsets the fluid levels in one's body. Not only does he want to drink liquid excessively, he also needs to go to the toilet often.

Then, two years later in February 2023, he was diagnosed with cancer after a bout of the flu. Despite recovering from the usual flu symptoms, he was still vomiting twice daily.

Doctors discovered he had a tumour in the brain, which affected his pituitary gland, which produces and releases several hormones for important bodily functions including growth.

To fight the cancer, doctors prescribed four cycles of chemotherapy, which involved a one-week stay in hospital each time.

He also had to undergo blood tests every four hours to check his blood sodium levels.

Chemotherapy exhausted Jordan immensely. He became lethargic, lost his appetite and threw up at least 10 times a day.

But Jordan still put on a brave front for his family members, and always reminded himself: "I must keep on staying strong and positive and fight cancer till the end."

After his chemotherapy, Jordan then underwent 30 sessions of proton therapy from May to July, a treatment where proton beams are used to target the cancer cells in his body.

As a result, Jordan had to miss school from February to September that year. His school would get his younger brother to take his worksheets home to him from time to time.

Despite his medical woes, he was mature and courageous, said his mother, Ms He Xin Tian, 39, a banker.

She recalled: "After hearing about Jordan's diagnosis of cancer, I tried to read as many medical journals as I could to understand more about childhood cancer, but Jordan kept reminding me not to read these journals since it would make me more anxious."

During his treatment, therapists from the Children Cancer Foundation (CCF) would help him while away the time and distract him from the pain by doing art, playing music or even baking at his bedside.

These experiences sparked his interest in drawing and painting, which he now enjoys passionately.

When he returned to school, the CCF helped him reintegrate by sending social workers to explain the situation and get his classmates' support too.

Asked about returning to school, Jordan smiled and said: "I'm really happy to see my classmates and friends again as I have seven good friends who are always there for me. These seven friends are important to me as our friendships are for keeps and we do everything together."

Now that his cancer was in remission, Jordan decided to do something for others.

He said: "As a child cancer survivor, I want to support other children who are going through cancer treatment."

Hair for Hope is an event in Singapore that raises funds and awareness of childhood cancer annually.

Volunteers shave their heads to create awareness for children with cancer, while getting their friends, relatives and members of the public to pledge donations.

This year, the event was held on July 27 and 28, while people could donate money from April 1 to Aug 18.

Jordan added that he had decided to volunteer for Hair for Hope to show the world that it was all right to be bald, and there was nothing to be ashamed of.

Asked for three words to describe himself, he said: "Resilient, brave and positive."