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# Championing Courage:

## The Heart of Children's Cancer Foundation's Work

Text by Dr Kevin Tay | Photos by Children's Cancer Foundation

Imagine a world where a child's laughter is replaced by the beeping of hospital machines, where playgrounds are swapped for hospital wards, and childhood dreams are put on hold by the harsh reality of cancer. This is the world many children with cancer face – a world where Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF) steps in to provide the care and support needed for these children and their families to thrive. Founded in 1992, CCF began with a mission: to ensure no child battles cancer alone. Over the years, we have grown as a beacon of light for more than 3,800 children and families impacted by childhood cancer.

### Holistic support: addressing every aspect of the cancer journey

Children's Cancer Foundation provides holistic support to children with cancer and their families, addressing their physical, emotional, social and psychological needs. A vivid example of this care is the journey of Shahas, an 11-year-old diagnosed with brain tumour. His family, like many others we support, faced overwhelming emotions after his diagnosis. CCF's dedicated team, which includes social workers, child life therapists and other direct service professionals, stepped

in to offer financial aid, emotional support and guidance for the family. Our comprehensive psychosocial care ensured that Shahas and his family never felt alone during this traumatic period.

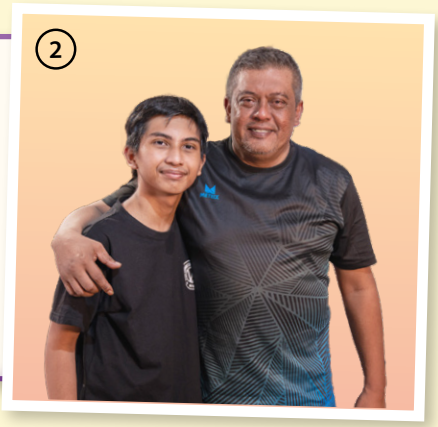
After a high-risk 13-hour surgery, Shahas faced further challenges when tests revealed that the tumour was cancerous. He experienced memory loss and had to relearn basic skills like walking, while also grappling with mood swings caused by the tumour's location. CCF's continuous engagement provided him with the emotional care he needed to persevere.

Meanwhile, CCF's family counselling services helped Shahas' parents and siblings cope with the significant changes they were seeing in him.

When Shahas began chemotherapy, CCF's social workers remained by his side. They provided comfort and companionship during his treatments, engaging him in interactive activities like puzzles to help ease the emotional burden of chemotherapy. This kind of personalised support reflects CCF's mission to address the unique needs of each child and family.

Shahas, now 14, has regained his mobility and dreams of becoming a businessman who helps others. His resilience, bolstered by CCF's support, is a testament to the lasting impact our programmes can have. Shahas' message to others facing similar challenges is one of hope: "Failure gives you two options. Either you stay down, or you get up. I prefer to get up, and so should you."

**"CCF was with us from the very start of the illness, supporting not only Shahas but also my family throughout the ordeal."**  
– Sharil, Shahas' father



## Hair for Hope: a symbol of community solidarity and strength

Stories like Shahas' are the reason why Hair for Hope (HfH) is such an important event. Every year, thousands of individuals shave their heads in solidarity with children like Shahas, demonstrating that they are not alone in their fight. The funds raised through HfH support programmes like those that helped Shahas and his family, providing psychosocial support, financial aid and educational services.

In 2024, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of Hair for Hope, setting a new record with over 4,900 participants. This overwhelming support from the community ensures that CCF can continue providing the comprehensive care that children and families rely on. HfH has become more than just a fundraiser; it is a movement that brings people together in solidarity.

## Partnerships with the medical community: a collaborative effort

Children's Cancer Foundation's success is built on strong partnerships with healthcare professionals. Our collaboration with doctors, nurses and hospitals ensures that children receive holistic care that goes beyond medical treatment, addressing their overall well-being. In Shahas' case, his medical team worked hand-in-hand with CCF to support him through surgery, chemotherapy and recovery. This seamless connection between medical care and CCF's psychosocial services created a bridge between the hospital and home, ensuring a holistic approach to his recovery.

In addition to direct care, CCF is committed to advancing childhood cancer research, supporting projects aimed at improving treatment outcomes and the quality of life for children like Shahas.

## Looking ahead: our vision for the future

As we look to the future, CCF is committed to expanding our impact through two key initiatives:

**1. Strengthening survivorship services:** Providing ongoing support beyond just treatment is critical for children. In Shahas' case, continuous support after his surgery was crucial



for his physical and emotional recovery. CCF is enhancing its survivorship programmes by forming new partnerships with healthcare institutions and developing services to ensure that survivors like Shahas have the long-term care they need to thrive.

### 2. Creating a centre of excellence:

Our vision for a centre of excellence is rooted in collaboration and innovation. By driving research and setting new standards in childhood cancer care, we aim to ensure that every child receives the best possible treatment, whether in Singapore or beyond. This centre will act as a hub for leadership, research and shared best practices in the field of childhood cancer care.

## A call to the medical community

To the medical professionals providing life-saving treatments and compassionate care, we extend our deepest gratitude. Your role is invaluable, and we invite you to join us in expanding this circle of care. Together, we can create a multi-disciplinary network that supports every

aspect of a child's cancer journey, from diagnosis to survivorship, just as we have done for Shahas.

## Together as one

Our journey is a story of courage, community and unyielding hope. It belongs to every child who has faced cancer, every family walking this path, and every supporter standing by our side. As we move forward, we remain committed to providing comprehensive care to our beneficiaries. With the unwavering spirit of our children and the continued support of our community, we are ready to forge ahead. Together, we are hope for children and families impacted by childhood cancer. ♦

### Legend

1. Participants at the Hair for Hope 2024 event (from left: Mr Gurmit Singh, Dr Kevin Tay, Mr Gabriel Loh, Minister Masagos Zulkifli, Mr Tan Yi Jun, Ms Julie Tan and Ms Peng Haiying)
2. Shahas and his father, Sharil
3. Supporters and shaves gather enthusiastically at the Hair for Hope 2024 event, awaiting their shave
4. Dr Kevin Tay as a ceremonial shavee for Hair for Hope 2024



Dr Tay earned his medical degree from the National University of Singapore Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. He further honed his skills through postgraduate training in internal medicine at the University of Hawaii and a medical oncology fellowship at the National Cancer Institute, National Institute of Health, USA.

