

RECYCLE YOUR HAIR

Jason collects hair, but not as a strange hobby or anything like that. It stems from his passion to connect people with long, healthy hair to cancer survivors who have lost theirs.

A close brush with cancer five years ago led Jason to an event where people lopped off their locks in support of a good cause. When he learnt that the cut hair would be discarded, he saw an opportunity to do more good.

Thus, he started Recycle Your Hair (RYH), a project that gives people the opportunity to donate their hair towards a wig that is given free of charge to those who are bald due to illness. Jason currently partners with the Breast Cancer Foundation, which offers the wigs to women who go to them for help.

MY STORY

When I was in Secondary School, I had a very close friend called Christine Chong Huixian (a medical school student of Class 2012) who suffered from brain lymphoma. During her battle with cancer, the year we turned 21 (our birthdays were only a day apart), she plucked up the courage to shave her head. Hair for Hope was due to take place in July 2009 and I was bordering on indecision: should I join her in shaving my head to show my support? In the end, I didn't manage to muster the courage to do it. She passed away at the end of that year.

In September 2013, I was planning to cut my long hair and the thought that my hair could help to make a difference for someone like Huixian came up. From my search, I came upon the RYH blog, a local version of Locks of Love, and contacted them. Since then, I have been volunteering in RYH, offering my help wherever needed.

Acknowledgement

I thank Our Better World – Telling Stories of Good to Inspire Action (<http://ourbetterworld.org/>) for providing the written information incorporated in my article.

CALL FOR SUPPORT

The process can be a laborious one – from getting the hair donations, cataloguing the hair received, getting the wig done, to finally sending it off to the partner organisation. The main challenge is to maintain a pool of hair, since it takes donations from about two to four people to form one compatible wig. We have also amassed some hair from children, which we hope to match with children with cancer, as the wigs for paediatric patients have to be customised in size.

Compared to synthetic ones, wigs made out of human hair are more comfortable, look more natural and last longer. However, they are expensive, sometimes costing more than \$1,000 and therefore unaffordable for many people. This is especially so when they're also dealing with medical expenses that can sometimes be debilitating.

Thanks to a local wigmaker – one of the remaining few in Singapore – who makes the wigs at a reduced cost of \$180, Jason's hope to benefit people stricken with the illness is made possible. Jason's commitment and persistence pushes him to continue his initiative, but we continue to struggle with finding volunteers to help behind the scenes with arranging hair collections and deliveries, as well as physically sorting and cataloguing hair donations.

While we do not deal directly with the medical issues of cancer patients, we hope to bring about a social awareness to recycle your hair for a worthy cause, to give the hair a new life and to give a small glimpse of hope to someone in need. We also believe that this project will thrive and reach out to a bigger crowd if more people are willing to lend a hand. ◆

Register your interest at <https://www.sma.org.sg/smacares> if you are keen to contribute to help RYH thrive in our society. For more info on RYH, visit <http://recycleyourhair.blogspot.sg/>.

SMA and the SMA Charity Fund support volunteerism among our profession. SMA News provides charitable organisations with complimentary space to publicise their causes. To find out more, email news@sma.org.sg or visit the SMA Cares webpage at <https://www.sma.org.sg/smacares>.

PROFILE



TEXT BY

TOH YANLING

Yanling is 28 years old and since young, she has aspired to become a doctor. By some quirk of fate, she has chosen to focus her career on the medical device industry. She lives by the quote from Winston Churchill: "We make a living with what we get, but make a life with what we give".