Boys brave the shave for Francis House hospice

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Kind-hearted youngsters from Greater Manchester have shaved their heads for Francis House Children's Hospice after hearing about the charity's shortfall in income from cancelled fundraising events as a result of the Coronavirus crisis.

Claire Rathmill from Brandlesholme, Bury, told her eleven-year-old son Ben, that his mop was ready for the chop but with the barbers closed, Ben suggested shaving his head and raising money at the same time.

It was not a decision he made lightly. Ben usually prefers his long locks to be styled rather than shaved off.

But after researching Manchester children's charities, Ben chose Francis House to benefit from his fundraising after reading about the hospice and its work caring for children with life-limiting conditions.

He said: "I felt really nervous at first, but with encouragement from my family and friends I knew I could do it. Even if there was a chance that I would look bad, I knew I would be proud of myself.

"I like the inspirational things that Francis House does to those children's lives and the support they give to the families."

With the help of mum Claire, a Macmillan service manager and clinical nurse specialist, a JustGiving page was set up with a modest target of £50.

Claire said: "We know Francis House is looking at alternative ways to raise funds. When we set up the page, we thought we'd start low and if we got anymore it would be a bonus.

"In the current climate charities are struggling financially and I am extremely proud of Ben for shaving his hair to raise money.

"He was nervous but overcame this, with a little help from his friends, as he streamed it live on Instagram. Thank you to everyone who sponsored him and for raising much needed funds for Francis House."

Family, friends, work colleagues and anonymous donations have seen Ben's fundraising rise to £365.

Ben added: "I feel amazing, I'm really happy with the result and to be honest I didn't think I'd raise that much which makes me even happier. I'm almost the happiest I've been in my life and happy it will help others."

Donate to the fundraiser https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/claire-rathmill4

Francis Chadwick, 5, also opted for the buzz cut after reading about the plight of the hospice, which is set to lose £250,000 through cancelled fundraising activities.

Helped by his brother Charles, 9, and mum and dad, Danielle and Ben, the family from Cheadle Hulme made a brilliant lockdown video describing how Francis came up with the idea of shaving his head.

With Danielle on camera and Charles voicing the part of his younger brother, scenes include Francis adhering to social distancing and talking on the phone to his grandparents Marysia and Ed Gorski who then agree to sponsor him £25 to shave his head.

Danielle said: "Francis House is a charity the boys give to through their school - Cheadle Catholic Infant School. Francis even gave his Christmas money to help the children and families.

"He was nervous about shaving his hair as he likes to style it - like Ronaldo the footballer -but after he thought about it, he wanted to do it and any money he makes will help change a child's life."

After uploading the video to YouTube other family members and friends have sent in donations to the Didsbury based hospice, and the current total stands at £125.

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Francis said: “I felt happy and sad to have my head shaved. Happy because I am helping poorly children and Francis House which shares the same name as me. Sad, because I can no longer put gel on and style my hair like Ronaldo. But I thinks it looks good and I like the way it feels.”

Francis is planning to grow his hair back so he can use gel again.

Watch the video here https://youtu.be/HfOQjX83rS0

Francis House provides care and support to more than 500 families from across Greater Manchester whose child has been diagnosed with a life-limiting condition. During the COVID-19 pandemic the hospice continues to offer support to families in the following ways: regular telephone calls to families unable to leave their homes; providing social emergency respite; symptom control and end of life care and use of the Rainbow rooms and bereavement support.

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