Alabama Teenager Shaves His Head, Raises Nearly $50,000 for Children With Cancer

The proceeds will benefit St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis.

July 19, 2021 By Caroline Tien

When Huntsville, Alabama, teenager Kieran Moïse traded his 19-inch Afro for a shaved head on May 29, the children with cancer at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital were on his mind.

At the time, Moïse, now 18, hadn't cut his hair since the death of a close friend from brain cancer in eighth grade. However, the recent high school graduate had committed to attending the U.S. Air Force Academy for college, and the academy mandates that all incoming male cadets must have hair that does not exceed two inches in bulk. With basic training coming up, Moïse turned the chop required of him into Kieran's Curls for Cancer, a fundraiser for St. Jude Children's Hospital in memory of his friend.

Kieran Moise and JoshCourtesy of Kelly Moïse

In a webpage publicizing the initiative, Moïse stated that he hoped to raise $1,000 per inch of hair for a total of $19,000. Noting that St. Jude had “really helped” his friend’s family, he wrote, “This is just one way that I feel like I can give back.”

Nearly 100 people watched on Facebook Live as Moïse had his hair braided and trimmed at local brewery Straight to Ale on May 29, according to CNN. By the end of the day, Kieran’s Curls for Cancer had raised $20,000, the news outlet reported. But the donations kept coming in. As of July 19, the fundraiser had netted $49,436, more than double Moïse’s original goal.

Kieran Moise beforeCourtesy of Kelly Moïse

"Kieran’s simple act of kindness exemplifies the power of younger generations and is something to celebrate, a selfless decision that will make a direct impact on the lives of the kids at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital and children everywhere for years to come,” Richard C. Shadyac Jr., the president and chief executive officer of American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities, which oversees fundraising and awareness for St. Jude, told CNN.

Ironically, Moïse himself might not know the impact he has had. He recently started basic training in Colorado Springs and will be without access to electronic devices for four weeks, according to CNN, meaning that he is all but completely cut off from the outside world. In effect, his mother, Kelly Moïse, 49, wrote in a postscript to the page, “HE HAS NO IDEA HE IS STILL DOING GOOD STUFF!!”

“Kieran has always been known for his hair. It was a big part of his personality and who he was,” she told CNN. “But he has always been the most compassionate and caring person. Since he was 6 years old, he somehow had the mindset of raising money and giving it to people who need it, and that never changed.”

When reached by Cancer Health, Ms. Moïse added, “This whole event has been mind-blowing. We had no idea that it would take off like this but are so excited that it did. Hopefully, many more people will be encouraged to do good stuff (that was his end goal). He has donations from 44 states and four countries!! Imagine that—all kinds of folks coming together to help. That is amazing!”

Kieran after with mom and dadCourtesy of Kelly Moïse

In addition to raising nearly $50,000 for St. Jude, Moïse's haircut will benefit the charitable organization Children With Hair Loss, which produces wigs for children and young adults who have lost their hair for medical reasons. The teenager's hair was donated to the nonprofit rather than discarded.

For more on children who have been diagnosed with cancer, see Childhood Cancer Resources, and read "Pediatric Cancer Survivor to Go on Historic Space Mission" and "COVID-19 Halts Treatment for Pediatric Cancer Patient."

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