Promoting Hair Donation to Provide Free Wigs for Cancer Patients

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Nearly half of all men and about one third of women will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetimes. As I have seen many family members and friends battle this awful disease, I understand the devastation that comes along with cancer, and the idea that nearly 1.5 million Americans were diagnosed in 2009 astonished me.

I started to think about these 1.5 million people and wondered who are they? What are their stories? How has cancer transformed their lives? According to Pantene Beautiful Lengths, “nearly 60 percent of women consider hair loss the most dreaded side effect they face when undergoing chemotherapy”.

Some women do not attempt to mask the reality of the situation by wearing wigs, wearing a scarf instead as a symbol of the fight and in an effort to increase awareness. For others, though, maintaining normality is an important part of their ability to cope. Sadly, many women do not have this option, as real-hair wigs can cost more than a thousand dollars. Because of this, I decided to focus my action plan on promoting hair donation to provide free wigs for cancer patients.

In order to reach out to the largest audience, I decided to focus my action plan on increasing awareness and involvement. Using the skills I learned at the Documentary Film for Social Change class, I created a short film that highlights hair donation, by showing how I donated my hair this January. The film describes the importance of donating hair to make wigs for cancer patients and shows how easy it is to do this. My goal is to encourage as many people as possible to donate their hair, as it takes seven ponytail donations to make one wig.

Creating the film was a process that involved research and technical preparation. I began the process over six months earlier, recruiting girls at school to grow their hair out in preparation for eventual donation. One other student and I were prepared to donate our hair at the time of the filming, and other students have donated subsequently. I enlisted a prominent Los Angeles hair and make-up artist, Barbara Farman, to cut our hair, and she was willing to donate her time and services for the project. I filmed the video with a standard digital camcorder, and edited it using the software iMovie. Other technical considerations included choosing the most effective camera angles, lighting, voiceovers, and music. I chose to include the song “I Am Not My Hair” by India Arie because it beautifully reflects the message of my video. Arie sings, “I am not my hair, I am not this skin... I am a soul that lives within”, reminding us that donating eight inches of hair is a just a small sacrifice compared to the difference we can make in the lives of others.

When the film was complete, in addition to sending it out to my friends and family, I posted it onto youtube.com, so that I could not only reach out to my community, but also reach out to a global audience. This has been very successful, and after having been posted for only five days, the video received over 500 views. I was surprised how easily I could reach out to such a wide audience, and proud to learn that the 500 views included viewers in countries such as Tanzania, Luxembourg, Germany, Taiwan, Canada, Italy, Switzerland, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, and more.

I learned that through social networking media, I can share an important message with a worldwide audience. This has inspired me to take my project even further and create other videos to highlight
social issues and promote community action. For example, I have already started plans with another student from my school to create a film focusing on her nonprofit organization, The Kutunza Kenya Foundation. This film will address medical care in Africa, highlighting this organization that is “committed to improving medical care in rural Kenyan clinics.” I believe that these videos can serve a dual purpose, to increase awareness about specific social issues and to inspire other young people to get involved in their communities.

To view my hair donation video, please see <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TX2eqNcMMDw">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TX2eqNcMMDw</a>.