

MiamiHerald.com 

Posted on Sun, Aug. 10, 2008

Share a Haircut helps needy kids

BY EILEEN SOLER

Adriel Sotolongo, 12, settled into a styling chair at the Hair Cuttery in Miramar and did a good deed for a child in need.

As soon as the first clip was measured for Adriel's auburn locks, another haircut was reserved free for a foster child through the hair-styling chain's Share a Haircut program.

"It's back-to-school season, and every child wants and deserves to look good on the first day of school -- *every* child," said stylist and Hair Cuttery district manager Elfira Perez, who oversees shops from Miramar to Davie.

Six hundred cutteries nationwide will offer free cuts to foster kids with every paid cut. The haircuts, available to infants up through 18-year-olds, cost \$10 to \$13. Donations end on Friday, but haircuts will be provided to foster children until all donations are given away.

Through this program last year, 40,000 foster children nationwide were sent to school with new hairdos. Perez said this year's goal is 55,000.

Adriel, of Miramar, did not know about the program when he stopped in for a cut. "It feels good to help out. I'm going to tell all my friends help, too," he said after learning about it.

Broward needs about 2,300 cuts for kids, said Jennifer Smith, foster-home recruitment coordinator for ChildNet, which places children separated from parents because of abuse, neglect or other reasons. ChildNet works closely with 14 child-focused social service agencies.

Smith said that as of Aug. 5, 1,040 Broward kids are living in licensed foster-care homes and shelters. Another 1,245 children are being cared for by relatives, friends or parents under supervision.

Broward foster parents receive \$15 a day for children up to age 5, \$17 a day for kids ages 6 to 12 or \$19 a day for children ages 13 to 18, as well as a \$300 voucher for back-to-school clothes, Smith said. But additional clothing, school supplies, registration and equipment for school clubs and sports programs and other extras turn dollars into pennies, she said.

"You can't imagine how excited, happy and appreciative everyone is when a free haircut comes at such an important time," Smith said.

Since the program in 1999, Hair Cuttery has provided 380,000 children with back-to-school cuts.

Perez said the chain is in the business of caring.

"We touch people by making them feel good on the outside and the inside. When a child looks in the mirror and likes what he sees, he feels confident. He can do anything," Perez said.

© 2008 Miami Herald Media Company. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.miamiherald.com>