

Hair-raising: how a wig can help cancer sufferers feel whole

Thomas Graham

WHEN Ayda Soydash was diagnosed with breast cancer in August 2007 she experienced an extraordinary mix of emotions, from confusion to outright anger.

"I was initially really angry and thought it was unfair. I wondered why it was happening to me."

But it was the loss of her hair that Ms Soydash, 30, of Campsie, really struggled to come to terms with.

"It was very distressing. I'd wake up in the morning and large parts had fallen out. I could no longer get up and style my hair like I'd been doing for the whole of my life. When your hair has fallen out you look in the mirror and feel like a man. But when I put a wig on, it made me feel like a woman again."

It was the newfound

confidence that Ms Soydash gained from wearing a wig that inspired her and the Breast Cancer Foundation to set up a wig library for cancer patients at the Royal Prince Alfred hospital.

"Before I wore a wig I had lost my expressive personality and creative style. It was frustrating waiting for everything to grow back and emotionally draining to see the reflection of a 'sick' person, when I no longer felt sick," she said.

Ms Soydash first wore a wig after her colleagues chipped in and bought one for her. When she told the Breast Cancer Foundation how much better it made her feel, the idea of the library was born.

And after responding well to treatment, she now has her health back and donated her

wigs to the library.

There will only be about 50 wigs when the library opens this month, and it is hoped there will be 200 by the end of the year.

Ruth Mirto, a breast care nurse at the Royal Prince Alfred, says the library will have a huge effect on sufferers. "The loss of hair is a vital point of the disease for women. Hair is an essential part of their identity... It's a reflection of how they express themselves and what it is to be a woman. Losing your hair... can put a strain on their relationships"

The Sydney Breast Cancer Foundation hopes to raise \$20,000 for 200 wigs a year. Donations to the wig library can be made online at www.sbcf.org.au or by phoning 9515 6345.



Ayda Soydash ... "When your hair has fallen out you look in the mirror and feel like a man. But when I put a wig on, it made me feel like a woman again." Photo: Steven Siewert