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FOR former hairdresser Kylie Murphy it's been a long time between sessions at the salon. But on Friday, as a Christmas treat, she got the works  a short, shoulder-length, layered cut and colour in the style of Hayley from Australian Idol, shaded to suit the summer months.

"It feels beautiful," she says as she admires the results of more than three hours' work in Nylon Hair, a St Kilda East salon offering its services free to those in need this Christmas.

Ms Murphy, 32, worked for almost a decade in salons in Glen Huntly Road and Bentleigh, but Huntington's disease, a neurodegenerative disorder that affects muscle co-ordination, put paid to her career because of the debilitating shakes it induces.

With a cut and colour costing the same as a week or more of her income from the disability benefit, she has had to economise, getting her hair done at home by a friend.

Businesses across Victoria pull the stops out this time each year to spread Christmas cheer around.

The **Mecca Bah** restaurant in Docklands has been hosting a Salvation Army Christmas Day brunch for the past three years, with about 100 guests expected for this year's gathering at 10.30am.

Down at the Sacred Heart Mission in St Kilda, Cabrini Health is providing Christmas gifts for more than 300 people expected to attend the annual Christmas lunch, while equipment financing company Alleasing has chipped in to make sure there's plenty of food on the table.

Nylon Hair's Jay Panda says his salon tries to donate money or products every Christmas. "This year we wanted to donate services," he says. "A lot of people felt they didn't have the money this year [to donate] but we can do other things."

Nylon Hair's search for candidates was helped by the local newspaper and by asking their clients. They also put the word out on Facebook, drumming up more than 30 free Christmas makeovers.

How big a deal is this pampering trip to the salon? Ms Murphy's sister Bec says Kylie spent a day deciding what to wear, weighing up five different outfits before settling on the dress. "She's feeling so special,"

Bec says.