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# PROJECT MAGIC



A magic project with children suffering from cancer.

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Dankwoord (a word of thanks)
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In writing my dissertation I've had help from many people. First of all I would like to thank Charlot, my promotor and guide of my internship. First and foremost because she gave me many opportunities to work with Project Magic during my period of internship. Secondly because of all the ideas she gave me while writing and finally because she reread my dissertation a final time.

I would like to thank my cousin, Valerie, especially because she helped me with my language problems and to reread my dissertation. Thanks to her I kept having faith. I would also like to thank Ivo Van Camp to include me in his magic sessions with the children and to use my input. I also want to thank my mother to check my dissertation for typo's and my boyfriend to help me with the lay-out. Finally I want to thank the parents and children of whom I could take photographs for my dissertation.

## Introduction

My dissertation concerns Project Magic. This is a therapeutic magic program which is currently running at the department of cancer for children 3K6 at the UZ in Gent.

Before I started my internship at 3K6, I thought doing magic tricks was a form of entertainment. When I found out about the therapeutic side of magic, I was fascinated and wanted to find out more about it.

During the magic sessions I started to observe the children and saw it had a huge influence on them. Their mood, their image of themselves and their occasional nausea improved remarkably after the magic sessions.

The goal of my dissertation is to give Project Magic more attention at 3K6. Project Magic is a very valuable program, but in order to get results, it is important that it is followed up.

In part one I will discuss the most important aspects of day to day life of the family and the child suffering from cancer.

In part two I will explain all about Project Magic. First I will explain the history of the project and you will get an idea on the workings and effects of Project Magic.

In this part I will also discuss the history of Project Magic in Belgium.

Part three deals with the history and workings of 3K6.

In part four I will deal with my personal experiences of my internship and the input of a specialised educator-guide at Project Magic.

During my internship I have put a lot of time in my dissertation and I have been able to observe the effects of Project Magic in many different situations.

I also learned that there are some children who don't like to do magic.

## Definition of the problem

Due to the illness and heavy treatment, children suffering from cancer often get a low self esteem.

This is mostly caused by the physical side effects such as, baldness, nausea, local accumulation of fat in the face and the stomach. But also the psychological and social consequences such as loneliness and a sense of inferiority are not to be underestimated. Children suffering from cancer are in a lose-lose situation and are not able to choose what happens to them.

I think this low self-esteem is a big problem with this target group and this is why Project Magic is such a good initiative. The magicians of Project Magic try to improve this low self-esteem by teaching the children things other people cannot do and by giving them things to talk about that they're worth something.

One of the problems of Project Magic is that the magician only visits once a month and so the patients don't advance very fast. Another problem is that because of this some of the effects of the therapy can be lost. The children don't spend enough time doing magic.

It is of course not always feasible for the pedagogic coworkers to put the necessary amount of time into the magic activities, as they have others important tasks as well. It would be better if more magicians were working for Project Magic.

## Part two: Project Magic

### **1. What is Project Magic?**

Project Magic is a therapeutic program which was founded to teach people with a physical, psychological or social set-back to do magic tricks so that these people can perform the tricks themselves.

Project Magic could be an addition to different types of therapies such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy which focus on revalidation, but it can also be used as an independent therapy; occupational therapy.

During the magic sessions therapeutic goals are achieved<sup>1</sup>, such as the improvement of motoric, social and cognitive skills. In addition the patients experience fun by doing magic tricks.

### **2. History of Project Magic**

Project Magic is an idea by David Copperfield. He received letters by and amateur-magician. Originally David Copperfield assumed they were written by a child.

When David Copperfield saw a photograph of the boy a while later, it turned out the childish handwriting was from a 20 year-old boy in a wheelchair. David Copperfield thought it was amazing that this young man saw himself as a magician rather than a handicapped person.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.projectmagic.be/pages/project1content.html>

David Copperfield was so affected by the energy and passion that the young man got out of doing magic that he started to think about this. He wanted to think of a way to get other people with a handicap in touch with the secrets of magic. He proposed his project to a group of therapists from the medical world, but they weren't convinced of the therapeutic effect of Project Magic. Julie DeJean, an occupational therapist on the other hand was very enthusiastic about Project Magic and has developed it further with David Copperfield.

Julie DeJean was an occupational therapist at the Daniel Freeman Hospital in Inglewood, California. In 1981, she and other therapists of the hospital started using Project Magic, an occupational therapy which uses magical illusions. The therapists and the patients noticed that this new therapy had an important therapeutic value. Since 1982 the project was also introduced into other medical facilities.

From that point on Project Magic has evolved into a project with an international status. Thousands of medical facilities all over the world are now using Project Magic as a full part of their revalidation or occupational therapy.

Countries using Project Magic are among others: Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Panama, Costa Rica, France, Germany, Great Britain, Guatemala, Iceland, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, the Republic of Singapore.

The project is not only applied in hospitals but also at:

- alcohol and drugs rehabilitation programs,
- arthritis centres
- schools for children with special needs and learning disabilities
- ...

### **3. Working Project Magic**

#### **3.1 The three links of Project Magic**

The three links of Project Magic are: the patient, the therapist, the magician. If one of these links is not present, one cannot talk of Project Magic. Basically the therapists and the patient decide on the goals of his revalidation and how his psychic and mental skills can be improved. Next the therapists and the magician select the magic tricks which can help achieve these goals. The magician will help the patient in mastering these tricks.

Because the magician has no experience in working with patients, a good collaboration with the medical staff is necessary. This will be minimal when the issue is improving self esteem. But when the therapy is used for a revalidation program, it is important that the magician knows which movements the patient is allowed to do and which he isn't. In this case the presence of medical staff is imperative.

#### **3.2 Why is a magician present?**

When a magician is involved with Project Magic, the children are much more motivated. The magician can perform the tricks and make them look magical, which will motivate the children to show perseverance. If it was simply the therapist teaching the patient tricks, it would seem a lot more like normal therapy. The magician gives the project added value because he can make the therapy seem like a recreational moment. The magician doesn't necessarily have to be a professional magician, he can also be an amateur who bring the magic across to the children. There is a handbook<sup>2</sup> in America about Project Magic which explains the tricks very clearly, so that anyone can learn them. Especially the enthusiasm of this person is important because he has to motivate the children.

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<sup>2</sup> This is a book written by David Copperfield on the (therapeutic) explanation of the tricks: KAUFMAN, R., *David Copperfield's Project Magic Handbook*, Canada, 2002.

## **4. Effects of Project Magic**

### **4.1 Skills which are trained by Project Magic**

By doing magic, many skills are trained by the patient, among others rough motor system, fine motor system, psychosocial skills, self awareness, focus and cognitive skills: eye-hand coordination, the memory, speech (the patients say what they are performing) and the ability to organise and concentrate (working with numbers improves the ability to solving problems). There are some tricks in which the patients have to calculate certain assignments and many tricks in which the patients need to move their arms and/or the rest of their body.

### **4.2 Effect on the individual**

Many people with a handicap or a disability on any area feel inferior and less skillful than people without a handicap. Because of the many skills which they are taught, the patients feel better and have a greater selfreliance. When these people can achieve something most people can't, this improves their self awareness and the image they have of themselves.

### **4.3 Effects on the therapy**

When dealing with a revalidationtherapy such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy, patients can loose interest because they consider the therapy boring and annoying, or because they experience pain during the exercises. Project Magic is new and will arouse a lot of interest and motivation which will give the patients the courage to continue leading to the fact that they will improve much more quickly.

Many patients consider the exercises more as recreation and a game, but at the and therapeutic goals are achieved.

## **5. History of Project Magic in Belgium**

Bart Keutgens<sup>3</sup>, a magician from Belgium, was very interested in this project and was informed of the results of Project Magic by David Copperfield and Julie DeJean. Bart came in touch with David Copperfield during his performance in Belgium and has started Project Magic in 1997 in Belgium with the approval and support of David Copperfield.

That same year Bart held a seminar together with David Copperfield and Julie DeJean in Antwerp to make Project Magic better known in Belgium. A lot of people from the medical world attended the seminar along with magicians and of course the media. Hof Ter Schelde, the revalidation centre and home at Antwerp as the first institution where Bart put Project Magic into practise. He stayed here for a couple of years.

In 1998 the magician Ivo Van Camp<sup>4</sup> started as a permanent magician for Project Magic. Bart and Ivo visited different institutions but they never got a permanent place where they could stay, due to lack of time, personnel and money.

Bart and Ivo also wanted to visit too many institutions at the same time which led to an inconsistent collaboration.

That same year Kristel De Roovere, a therapist in training, did her dissertation on the scientific working of Project Magic. She got a lot of help from Bart. De Roovere has continued to follow up on Project Magic but kept her focus on Project Magic as a revalidation therapy, while Bart and Ivo specialised further as an occupational therapy.

In America in 2002 there was a celebration for the twenty year anniversary of Project Magic. Bart and Ivo were also invited and were allowed to explain the workings of Project Magic in Belgium. Bart and Ivo use in their sessions besides the tricks, balloons as well. They have presented this in America and got the approval of David Copperfield to use this in Project Magic because the children get the opportunity to fold the balloons into figures themselves.

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<sup>3</sup> Bart Keutgens will hereafter be referred to as Bart because that is how he is addressed at the department.

<sup>4</sup> Ivo Van Camp will hereafter be referred to as Ivo or magician because that is how he is addressed at the department.

## Part 3: Project Magic and children with cancer

### **1. History of 3K6, the cancer department for children at the University Hospital in Gent**

After a presentation at service club Rotary at Antwerp, Bart and Ivo were allowed to present David Copperfield's Project Magic at the cancer department at the university hospital in Gent. Because Rotary already supported the children with cancer fund, they made the contacts.

Bart and Ivo were very pleased with this and made contact. Together with a psychologist at 3K6, Nathalie Nolf, and the pedagogic coworkers they discussed the project and organised a try-out. The children at 3K6 were very enthusiastic and they decided to start Project Magic at this department. At this moment Bart and Ivo organise Project Magic only at 3K6 and the magician visits all children once each month.

### **2. Specific working at 3K6**

Ivo visits 3K6 once every month, each time on a Thursday. He has been acknowledged by the children-with-cancer-fund as a volunteer and does not receive any pay, except for his travel expenses. Ivo is not dressed as a magician but only wears a small hat and an apron with some balloons. This way the children cannot confuse him with the regular clowns who simply come to distract the children.

All children are in separate rooms, some in an isolated room. When Ivo visits, he visits all the children. If they're not old enough to do magic themselves, he



makes them a figure with balloons. If the children are in A-isolation (complete isolation), he will perform the tricks behind the window and the children can join him in their room.

*(Photo of Demi who is visited by the magician, even though isn't old enough yet to do magic himself. He receives a balloon shaped like a butterfly. 21 April 2005)*

When the magician arrives in the morning he consults the pedagogic coworkers first. This can be about the mood or the feelings of the children or whether they have to lie in bed or can sit up.

From the age of five, Ivo tries to do some real magic with the children. Younger children only get a balloon if they don't realize what doing magic is.

The tricks Ivo teaches the children are among others<sup>5</sup>:

*The Jumping Rubber Band:*

The children make the rubber band jump in a magical way from their little finger and their ring finger to their index and their middle finger and back again.

*The Floating Wand:*

The children make a magic wand stick to their fingers.

*The Impossible Knot:*

The children perform this trick with a volunteer who tries to copy them. The children will be able to tie a knot without releasing either of two ends of a rope, while the volunteer can't. (cfr. Photos in appendix 1, 2)

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<sup>5</sup> The explanation for these tricks can be found in appendix III

## Part 4: Project Magic in practice

### **1. Project Magic improves the self esteem**

At 3K6 I noticed that Project Magic helps to improve the children's self esteem.

Project Magic can have a positive effect on social self image because the children have a pleasant contact with the magician and with the potential audience of their tricks. The children have interesting things to tell, because ill children in a hospital don't have much to talk about.

Project Magic also influences the emotional self image of the children because they can feel happy and cheerful when they succeed in doing one of the tricks or when they receive a balloon from the magician.

The cognitive self image can also be improved by Project Magic. Children who learn the secrets of magic, can do something others can't. With Project Magic the children also learn to do tricks with numbers, such as predicting a number. This way the cognitive skills are trained. This makes the children feel intelligent.

The physical self image can be improved because the children often have to sit up or get out of bed while doing the tricks. This makes them feel good about their physical skills. If children have to lie in bed all day, they often experience a lack of energy which can lead to loss of self esteem. Project Magic tries to motivate the children to move and get out of bed.

The case of Joris shows that the children are very proud of their abilities and that Project Magic can have an influence on the social self image.

*Case of Joris:*

*Joris is a twelve year old boy who has leukaemia. Every time again he looks forward to the visit of the magician, Ivo. He is very happy when he comes on Thursday to explain to him a very complicated trick: the trick of the three ropes. This is a trick where you turn three ropes of different lengths in a magical way*

*into three ropes of equal lengths and make one disappear. After a couple of times of practice with a magician, Joris knows how it works. After the magician left, Joris and I kept practising until no-one would be able to find out the secret of this trick. When Joris showed this trick to his parents later in the evening, he is extatic that they don't understand at all.*

*Every Friday Geert, a volunteer, comes to play with the children. Joris is happy that Geert visits him as well that day and announces that he will perform the trick for him as well. When Joris shows it to him, he loves it that Geert doesn't understand at all and therefore looks up to him.*

## **2. Structuring Project Magic at 3K6**

During my internship I noticed that the children often don't know that the magician will visit. I also noticed that the children often do the same tricks and therefore didn't learn much at all.

I have tried to improve this by introducing two aids:

### **2.1 Announcement board**

This is a big announcement board that hangs at the reception of the department. I've made a week planning and next to every day a picture is hung up of the activity for that day.

(Photo board of week 18/4 till 22/4)

The announcement board is next to the reception so that it is immediately noticeable when the families come to check in their child before they receive a room.

This way everyone can see which activities are planned for that week. (more photos appendix I, 1)

I mainly made this announcement board to announce the Project Magic activities but I also made pictures for all other activities at 3K6.

I also made the announcement board so that the children can prepare for the arrival of the magician or their other



favourite activities. The week in which the magician comes the children will practice their tricks a bit more so they will be able to perform them flawlessly. The children are always very proud when they can perform the last trick they learned and show they still remember it.

Because the children often think Project Magic is a Happy Hour activity, they expect the magician to arrive on Wednesday. The announcement board is very important to prevent disappointment.

The case of Sari shows this.

*Case of Sari:*

*Sari is a four year old child. She always looks forward to the magician's arrival because every time he makes her a balloon. The frog is her favourite animal.*

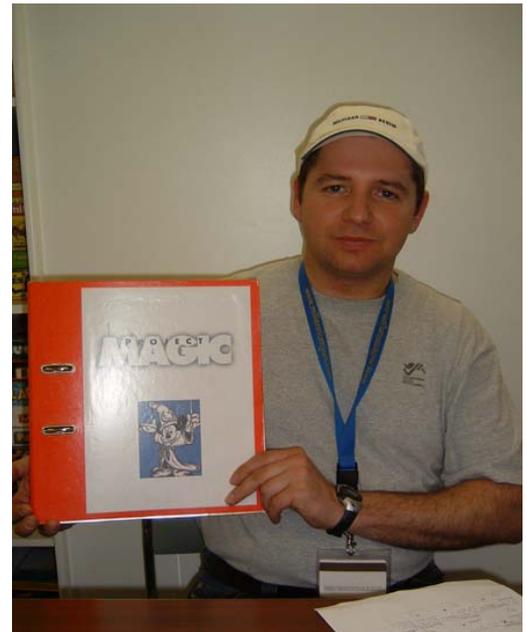
*On Wednesday, at the time when there was no announcement board, Saru would await the magician all day long. When it turned out he wasn't coming until the next day, she was very dissatisfied.*

## **2.2 The map**

At the room of the pedagogic co-workers I have left a map which contains one sheet per child (appendix II) and the explanation of the tricks. The sheet mentions which tricks the children have learned during their magic session. This helps the magician remember which tricks he has already taught the child so that he can build on that and to see if the children remembered the previous tricks. They can also contain certain special messages to remind the magician where he has to pay attention to with each child. Ivo uses this map to prepare his magic sessions and to add new information later on. (another photo, appendix I,1)

The explanation of the tricks are also in this map, so that the pedagogic coworkers and others users of the map can understand the tricks and help the children when they don't remember its secret.

(Photo of the magician with the map, 21 April 2005)



### **3. Evaluation of Project Magic at 3K6**

#### **3.1 Project Magic is ideal as occupational therapy**

During my internship I have experienced Project Magic to be ideal as occupational therapy done by a pedagogic coworker.

If I had to accompany a child for examination or we had to wait before an operation, I always brought my magic material such as a magic wand, some rubber bands or ropes. This way I could distract the children when they were nervous or if we had to wait a long time. I also noticed it is a good distraction for the parents as well, because they are usually nervous as well and are happy that they can take their mind of things for a while.

The case of Valerie shows that a bit of magic material can distract children for a long time and in a fun way.

*The case of Valerie:*

*The pedagogic coworkers accompany the children into the operating room where they stay with the child until it sleeps.*

*Valerie is a nine year old girl and is in the final stage of her treatment. Valerie only had to undergo a minor surgery to remove her Hickmancatheter. I joined Valerie and her mother to the waiting room and would stay with Valerie until she was asleep.*

*When we arrived at the waiting room we would have to wait a long time before it was Valerie's turn. It was now up to me to occupy Valerie and her mother until it was time for her operation. Luckily I had brought my magic material. Valerie already knew the trick of the floating wand and showed it to her mother and to me. I taught her the trick of the jumping rubber bands and the trick of the impossible knot.*

*After a while the magic turned into playing with the ropes and rubber bands and Valerie started making up tricks of her own. Her mother and I had to watch carefully and then try to copy her tricks. This way Valerie and her mother were busy for an hour and a half but time seemed to pass a lot quicker.*

### **3.2 Project Magic helps children deal with the feeling of being ill**

The case of Gerd shows that children forget their feeling of being ill when distracted.

*Case of Gerd:*

*Gerd is a fourteen year old boy who is in after treatment so doesn't have to come to the hospital that often anymore.*

*On Thursday the magician had visited him and taught him the trick with the three ropes.*

*On Friday I visited Gerd and he had forgotten the trick. Fortunately I knew it and I gave him some tips to make him remember it. After half an hour of puzzling, he remembered it again and he was very happy that he could do the trick again.*

*Normally Gerd was allowed to go home that night, but because he had been feeling nauseous since the day before, the doctor advised that he should stay one more night.*

*After the moment of doing magic the doctor entered and asked if Gerd was feeling better. He said he felt much better and he even showed the doctor his trick. The doctor was impressed and saw that Gerd was indeed feeling better and let him go home that night.*

### **3.3 Repetition is important**

The case of Gerd shows that it is important to have someone at the department who knows something about the tricks. The tricks aren't very difficult themselves, but if you forget the secret you cannot perform them anymore.

If the children can repeat the tricks with the pedagogic coworkers, they will forget them less easily.

### **3.4 Project Magic improves the group feeling at 3K6**

When the magician comes on Thursday, all children are looking forward to the same thing. They all await a new trick and a balloon.

The rooms at 3K6 have windows on all sides. If the family wants privacy, they can close the curtains, but they usually remain open during the day. When the magician is in one room doing magic, the children in the adjoining rooms can watch and get to know each other. If the children get a balloon they show them to their neighbours through the windows.

Project Magic improves the group feeling although the children are all in separate rooms and have no verbal contact.

### **4. Tip for the future**

- It is important that some people at the department know all tricks so that they can help the children if they have forgotten their trick. When children see that other children are doing magic with the pedagogic coworkers they will want to learn the tricks as well.

The magician can contribute to this by including everyone with Project Magic and giving them the explanation for the tricks.

- It would be good if there was magic material available at the department. Now the children receive ropes and rubber bands from the magician and take them home with them, but they always forget to bring them back to the hospital. If there were a permanent collection of magic material present at the hospital, the children would be able to practise at the hospital.

Ivo has already make some plans for this item. He is working on developing a magic box with sterile magic material. This box would stay at the department and there would also be magic boxes to give to the children as a present.

This is good alternative so that the children don't have to wait to do magic for the magician to arrive.

- Ivo uses balloons in Project Magic so that he can give the smaller children something. During my internship I have noticed that it is a lot of fun if the children can help fold the balloons. Some children were very enthusiastic about this and therefore got some balloons and a guide to make figures with them.

During the magic moments these balloons could be used as a therapeutic exercise. It would be even better, if the department could arrange for balloons to be present so the children could fold them themselves with the help of pedagogic coworkers.

- It would be good if all tricks were repeated regularly either with the magician or the pedagogic coworkers. The map I made can help to show which child has been taught which trick during the past magic sessions.
- It would be fun if more magicians visited so the children would get in touch more with Project Magic. Now it happens regularly that a child doesn't see the magician for three months. This is because some children don't have to come to the hospital on the day the magician comes to visit 3K6. If there were more magicians, the children would have more opportunities to meet him.

Ivo is constantly looking for new magicians but this isn't always easy. One of the reasons for this is that they only work with volunteers.

### **5. Tips for a pedagogic co-worker/ educator for Project Magic at 3K6**

- It is not the idea that the pedagogic coworkers become magicians, only that they regularly repeat the tricks. They can also teach new tricks so that the children don't always practise the same tricks and they want to learn new things as well.

The magic and special shows still remain a power held by the magician.

- The pedagogic coworkers therefore have minimal knowledge of the tricks so that they can help the children when they have forgotten their tricks.

- The pedagogic coworkers complete the announcement board and make sure everybody knows when the magician is coming. They practise the tricks on the days before his arrival and repeat the new tricks the days after he has visited.
- Before the start of the magic sessions, the pedagogic coworkers give a short explanation to the magician about each child.
- When the pedagogic coworkers have to accompany a child to an operation or examination, they bring the magic material. While they wait they can occupy the child with doing magic.
- The pedagogic coworkers cannot force the child to do magic. Some children are not interested in magic and don't like doing it. This has to be respected.

## Conclusion

Through daily contact with children with cancer I have experienced that cancer is more than only a medical problem. It is therefore important that besides medical aspects, the pedagogical and psychological aspects are also considered.

It is the job of the pedagogic coworkers to guide the family and the child in this. Besides the basic skills of the pedagogic coworkers to guide the families, the pedagogic coworkers at 3K6 can also turn to Project Magic. At 3K6 Project Magic is used as occupational therapy, but it can also be used for revalidation programs.

Project Magic was founded in America by David Copperfield and was later started in Belgium by Bart Keutgens.

My goal was to give Project Magic more attention at 3K6. I have made the announcement board and the map for this reason. This gave Project Magic more structure and made it easier to follow-up on. Thanks to these improvements the advantages of Project Magic immediately became clearer.

The pedagogic coworkers can use this therapy in many different situations. It is an ideal occupational therapy and it can also help the children forget their feeling of being ill.

While writing my dissertation I became convinced of the usefulness of Project Magic. In the future I will therefore continue to promote this project further.

## Appendices

### **Tabel of content**

Appendix I, 1-3	Photo's
Appendix II	Chart

## Photo's

'Magician Ivo besides the announcement board, 21 April 2005'



'Ivo completes the chart after the magic sessions, 21 April 2005'



Appendix I, 2

'The patient practises the trick of the impossible knot with Ivo, 21 April 2005'



Appendix I, 3

'The child is very happy with the balloon Ivo is making him, 21 April 2005'



Appendix II, Chart



Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Special remarks	Development
		

