


Together Against Leukemia—the Strength of a Small Community

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Introduction

Children are not only part of the community, but function in their own communities such as schools (1). When a child is diagnosed with a childhood malignancy, prolonged treatment not only separates the child from their functional community, but also the community is left without a societal member (2).

All parties are best served by communicating about the diagnosis, within the limits of confidentiality and the patient's wishes (1). New channels should be established to ensure the patient of their place in their various communities. This presents the opportunity for all parties to process the feelings that a cancer diagnosis elicits in each community member (1,2).

We share the expression of these feelings in an educator from a small Flemish community and the productive actions they undertook to create channels to support their community member during his oncological treatment. The educator shared his thoughts on a number of social media platforms to benefit the school faculty, parents, and caregivers that constituted the patient's communities.

The Letter to the Community

*For John**

A while ago I called you together. One of our pupils, our John, found out that he had leukemia. It touched everyone in our team to the core. We're now a few weeks further. John is fighting an incredible battle. One that we wanted to support. To help. Support from the sidelines without imposing ourselves. And as a principal, it was a joy to see the following events unfolding...

For the Hospital Staff

Doctors, specialists, and psychologists were taking care of John's health. The classmates and teachers were supported

by a hospital psychologist, which deserves to be highlighted. She brought the message of his diagnosis to his classmates. The teacher felt very supported. It was not easy for her but we did what we could as a team. In the meantime, John was taught in hospital by two wonderful 'hospital teachers'. A big thank you to everyone who helps, cares, and supports!

For Bednet (Electronic Distance Teaching Provided by the Bednet Organization)

Bednet immediately involved us in their plans. A fantastic organization that builds the heart-warming bridge that is so crucial to make home education for patients a success. John wanted to do work for school. John missed his classmates. John wanted to move forward. That is how we know him. Now we are embarking on this adventure together for John so that he can participate in the lessons. This makes him feel our commitment and support. This way he receives his education, because learning is a basic right.

*For a Very Strong Class Teacher: Miss Carol**

When I heard the class teacher speak, my appreciation for her only increased. She would be offering extra home tuition

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during this period. New for all of us, but also very exciting for her. Uncharted territory. She was steering and continues to do so, the class group through these turbulent waters in a very warm-hearted manner. The classmates made flowers and surprises for John and wrote him letters. The class teacher also created space for each pupil to talk or write about their own sadness. This while she continued to work on her regular program and then came up with a wonderful proposal...

The John Cup

She wanted to hold a benefit on “pajamas day” (A festive day organized by the Bednet organization to put all the children who follow homeschooling in the spotlight. On that day, all pupils in primary schools in Flanders come to school in their pajamas to express their support for the sick pupils.). John is a football fan. He will be the trainer this time—even from his hospital bed. He chose some classmates to play a match against a team of teachers. Everyone on the teachers’ team agreed and participated wholeheartedly. One teacher provided the jerseys and the class made banners to support them. At 10 o’clock we played John’s match on our playground. We filmed it and streamed it to him in real time. For him. Because we care about him.

Tourist LeMc, Adil El Arbi, Sander from Ketnet, Jeroom, Yari Verschaeren (Flemish Celebrities)

The care teacher, Christine*, also wanted to help. Our teachers reached out to many people. All these well-known Flemish celebrities recorded a video message for John. Purely to support him. At the request of a teacher from a small school in Antwerp. We all agreed that you were truly caring people and we happily delivered your message to John! It would help him tremendously. Thank you very much!

Final Word

This is what I am here to witness. All the effort. All the warmth. An incredible number of people with only honorable intentions. Well, that is what we do. Here in our school, we are creating our small community with very strong people! Not only my teachers, but all teachers deserve a lot of appreciation for this. Also, all the people who give the best of themselves every day in caring for others, regardless of whether they work in education or in a health care setting.

That is why I am happy to share this story.
A proud principal.

Conclusion

The identity of a child is even more important during cancer treatment (3). Therefore, the development of flexible education and health care remains an integral part of the multidisciplinary approach of a patient diagnosed with cancer (3). This has a bidirectional benefit for all community members to constructively process the changes associated with a diagnosis of childhood cancer.

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Author Contributions

BJ wrote the original letter, all other authors contributed to the conceptualization of the manuscript, translation, and critical review.



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