



Pediatric  
Brain Tumor  
Foundation

# IMAGINARY FRIEND SOCIETY

JAY CHIAT AWARDS 2018  
NONPROFIT





# SUMMARY

Cancer is scary for anyone, but for a child it's even scarier. They're faced with complex information that's confusing and often terrifying.

Medical research has shown that when pediatric cancer patients understand what's happening to them and what to expect, they feel less scared, experience less anxiety, and do much better overall. Unfortunately, there are limited resources that explain cancer care in a way kids can relate to and understand.

Our solution was to make a resource for kids that makes abstract cancer information concrete through entertaining, relatable stories. Through a series of 22 animated short films, the Imaginary Friend Society characters explain every facet of cancer, from "What is Cancer?" to more emotionally complicated topics like "Feeling Sad."

The IFS has been adopted by leading hospitals around the country, translated into over a dozen languages, and is arming kids with information to help them in their fight against cancer.

# THE BACKGROUND

Each year, an estimated 300,000 kids are diagnosed with cancer. That's about one child every three minutes.

With a cancer diagnosis comes complex terminology and procedures that are intimidating, confusing and often terrifying. Things like radiation, chemotherapy, blood transfusions, and MRIs—just to name a few.

So, when the Pediatric Brain Tumor Foundation (PBTF) came to us for help with some simple pro bono marketing materials, we saw a much bigger opportunity.

**Rather than just produce a typical awareness-generating campaign targeting adults, we saw an opportunity to directly help the kids themselves.**





# DIGGING INTO THE PROBLEM

To better understand pediatric cancer, we interviewed doctors and medical professionals, reviewed medical research, talked to pediatric cancer survivors, and dug into developmental psychology. Through our research we identified a big issue:

**THERE WERE VERY LIMITED RESOURCES AVAILABLE THAT EXPLAINED CANCER AND CANCER CARE IN A WAY KIDS COULD RELATE TO AND UNDERSTAND.**

This lack of resources led to fear, stress and anxiety. Because when kids don't understand what's happening and know what to expect, they often imagine the worst.

And not only were resources for kids lacking, parents and caregivers also felt they didn't have the right tools and language to help their children.

# THE INSIGHTS

We uncovered two simple but powerful truths that drove the strategy and creative:

1

## WHEN KIDS UNDERSTAND WHAT'S GOING ON, IT CAN HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR HEALTH

When kids understand what's happening to them and what to expect, they feel less scared, experience less anxiety and have greater confidence—which leads to better medical outcomes.

2

## MEDICAL TOPICS ARE EASIER TO UNDERSTAND WHEN COMMUNICATED IN KIDS-SPEAK

From a developmental standpoint, children process information differently than adults. Kids can't understand abstract concepts that are foreign to them; they need information to be delivered in a concrete way through relatable stories, events and characters.





# THE STRATEGY

We set out to create a lasting resource that:

- **Translates medical-speak into kid-speak**
- **Makes abstract information understandable through entertaining, relatable stories**
- **Arms kids, parents and care providers with easy-to-understand information to help reduce anxiety and increase confidence**

# THE IDEA

## IMAGINARY FRIEND SOCIETY



Pediatric Brain Tumor  
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We created a group of fun, fictional characters called the Imaginary Friend Society (IFS). Their job? To help deliver cancer-care information in a way kids can relate to.

The idea itself was inspired by real pediatric cancer survivors who told us they had imaginary friends who helped them cope with long hospital stays. These tend to be lonely stretches even with family and loved ones around and are the times when imaginary friends are needed most.



# BRINGING THE IDEA TO LIFE

Through a series of 22 animated short films, the Imaginary Friend Society characters explain every facet of cancer these kids face. Everything from “What’s an MRI?” to “Who Will Take Care of Me?” to more emotionally complicated topics like “Finding Out You Have Cancer” and “Feeling Sad.” Valuable stories and information embedded in entertaining content that help kids gain a little bit of control and understanding in their fight against cancer.

The films launched at the Pediatric Brain Tumor Foundation’s Starry Night event in Los Angeles on September 24, 2017, during Childhood Cancer Awareness Month.



# BEYOND THE FILMS

We invited people to donate their own imaginary friends through a submission page on the Imaginary Friend Society webpage or on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter with the hashtag #ImaginaryFriendSociety.

The donated imaginary friends were used to create coloring books, journals, and motivational posters for kids in hospitals. We even created Imaginary Friend dolls that children can take into MRI machines for a little comfort.

We brought the characters to life in a medium kids are already using – mobile devices. A free app allows kids, families and medical professionals to place the Imaginary Friend characters into any environment through an immersive AR experience. These characters offer words of encouragement in real time, providing comfort when kids need it most, like before a procedure.



# SPREADING THE WORD

As a pro bono effort, there was no planned media for IFS. Spreading the word was dependent on getting people to see its value and rally around the idea. Without a single media dollar being spent, IFS received significant media support:

- **Markets covering 83% of the U.S. ran the IFS films**
- **We reached 22 of the 25 top-ranked DMAs**
- **In Los Angeles, the CW aired the spots in the weeks leading into and in encores of the Rose Parade, garnering approximately 4.5MM impressions**
- **IFS began airing nationally on Hulu in March 2018**
- **Pandora® ran mobile units from March to May 2018**

The campaign received \$1M in media value and more than 46.3MM PR impressions, a \$402K advertising value equivalent.



## These Cartoon Characters Are Helping Kids Cope With Cancer

BY: Cat Sandoval



### Imaginary Friend Society – explaining cancer to kids

Imaginary Friend Society is a series of animation videos that explains cancer to kids in a sensitive and fun way.



### An AR app is helping child cancer patients cope with anxiety

BY ABRAR AL-HEETI / JULY 3, 2018 5:00 AM PDT

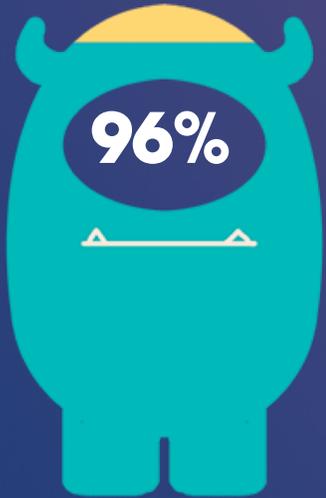
## CREATIVITY

### 'IMAGINARY FRIENDS' EMPOWER CANCER-STRICKEN KIDS IN THIS TOUCHING ANIMATED CAMPAIGN

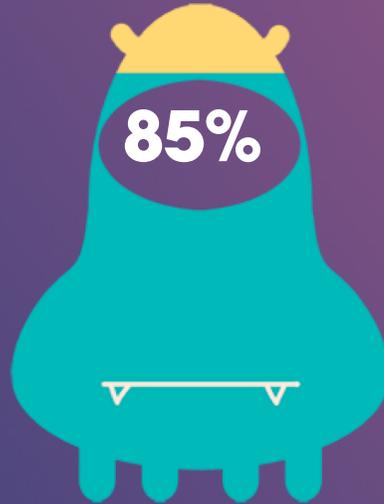
By Alexandra Jardine. Published on Sep 26, 2017



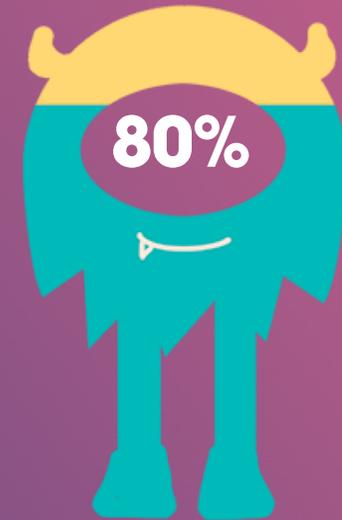
# IMPACT ON FAMILIES



**SAID THE VIDEOS  
HELP PARENTS AND  
CAREGIVERS TALK  
WITH KIDS ABOUT  
DIFFICULT ISSUES.**



**SAID THE FILMS  
HELPED KIDS FEEL  
LESS ANXIOUS AND  
SCARED.**



**SAID THE  
VIDEOS MEET A  
REAL NEED.**



**THIS IS WONDERFUL,  
MIKE WOULD HAVE LOVED THIS.**

@IanSchmeisser



**WORK LIKE THIS  
GIVES ME HOPE.**

@ElyseKelly



**IMPORTANT, BEAUTIFUL, INSPIRING**

@Charleey.indd



**MY SON'S FAVORITE. IT HAS  
HELPED HIM SO MUCH.**

@JensenStottler



**I'D LOVE TO SEE THAT WHEN  
I WAS AT THE HOSPITAL. FANTASTIC!**

@Kelcey



**I'M IN TEARS  
CAN'T STOP WATCHING THESE**

@RickDolishny

# ADOPTION BY THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY

**Our greatest success was the medical community adopting the Imaginary Friend Society and implementing it in hospitals around the country.**

After seeing the positive impact on kids fighting cancer, leading hospitals around the country, like Children's Hospital Los Angeles, Children's Hospital Philadelphia and the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, have permanently adopted the Imaginary Friend Society into their in-hospital networks or staff resources. The well-respected Association of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Nurses (APHON) has included the films among their resource materials.

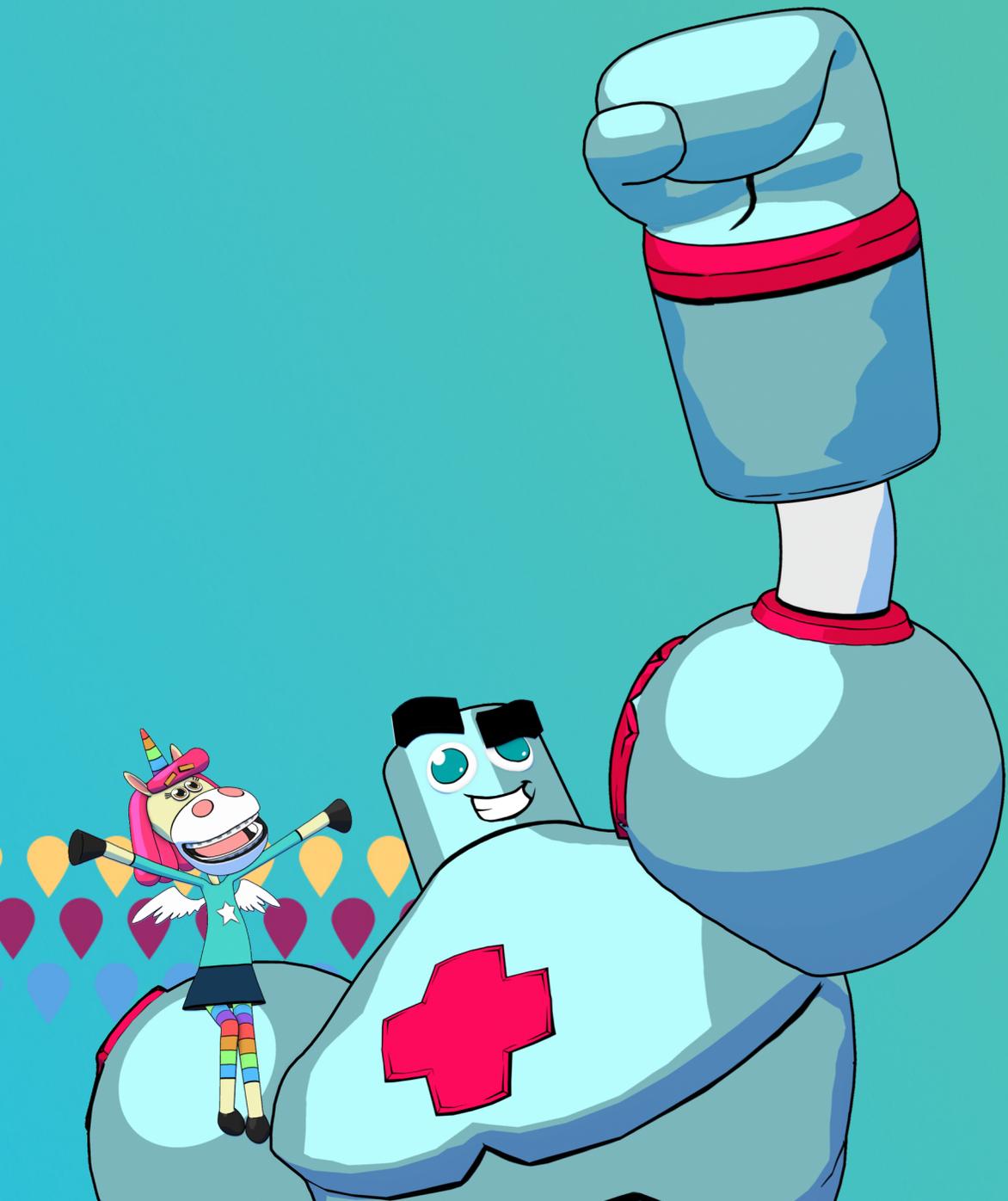
*"We started having the Imaginary Friend Society on the 'Get Well' network at the hospital...We've been amazed at seeing how the kids really gravitate towards this."*

– Dr. Mark Krieger, Chief of Neurosurgery, Children's Hospital Los Angeles



**Children's**<sup>SM</sup>  
Healthcare of Atlanta





# GLOBAL REACH

What could have been a simple awareness campaign for PBTf turned into a global tool.

Pediatric cancer organizations from around the globe reached out to us to translate the films and are using them to help children in their communities.

The films have been translated into a dozen languages (from Farsi to Swedish) and are available in countries around the world.



# FINAL THOUGHT

While it's not a cure, the Imaginary Friend Society provides a much-needed resource that's had a real impact in the fight against pediatric cancer.