

Société Alzheimer Society

C A N A D A

April 14, 2016

Mary Beth Wighton
Board Member – Ontario Dementia Advisory Group

Dear Mary Beth,

Thank you for your letter received April 11 outlining your concerns with the new direction of Dementia Friends Canada. We appreciate your thoughtful feedback as it helps us shape the initiative moving forward.

We are working with the Public Health Agency of Canada and Manifest Communications, as well as our Federation partners and other stakeholders, to build a successful Dementia Friends initiative that engages Canadians in understanding a little more about dementia. While Dementia Friends Canada is not an education program, we have taken your earlier feedback to ensure a more positive and person-centred approach in building public awareness.

There are many groups that we want to reach through Dementia Friends Canada but we have to start somewhere. We understand the direction taken by Manifest in terms of engaging woman. Market research tells us that women are caretakers of their families' health. Women as a target audience is a starting point; they are “the bull’s-eye” as Andrea explained. However, we know there are many other groups outside of that target that we need to connect with. We do not support the notion that there is a “philosophical switch” in the initiative. We are still trying to reach the broader group and now we have a good strategy in place to get us there.

What we heard from our partners and stakeholders was that the strategy of recruiting Friends by having them come to the website, watch a short video and register was not engaging enough and there was no compelling call to action. What we've seen from Manifest's social media strategy is that people are receiving weekly posts and they are sharing these and talking. Community is starting to build, and conversations are happening via these channels. We see this as a positive step towards addressing stigma.



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There are many ways that Canadians can be a Dementia Friend and we don't want to exclude anyone who wants to do more from taking that extra step. We want to inform, inspire and create the opportunity for people to participate at whatever touch-point makes sense for them.

We fully acknowledge that in the switch in the governance structure we missed a key touch-point in having you connect directly with Manifest Communications. We further acknowledge that when you did finally connect with the agency, it was late in the creative process.

We are saddened by your notice of withdrawal. You have been a powerful and positive influence on Dementia Friends Canada. It would make us very happy if you would reconsider your involvement. I understand that Rodney Ghali, my counterpart at the Public Health Agency of Canada is interested in speaking with you to further discuss your concerns. His office will be reaching out to you directly to arrange a meeting

Sincerely,



Mimi Lowi-Young, M.H.A., Dip Bus. Admin., FACHE, FCCHL
Chief Executive Officer
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CC. Rodney Ghali Director General of the Centre for Chronic Disease Prevention – Public Health Agency of Canada



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